SHORT STORIES

No. 779.] Week ending December 5th, 1903. [Price One Penny.

Shackell rushed up the steps waving a telegraph form in his hand. Sara was standing by the door at the top. "Too late! too late!" she cried.

(A Thrilling Episode from this week's "THE PURSUIT OF SARA." See inside.)

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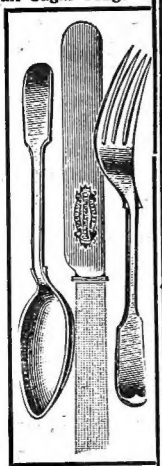

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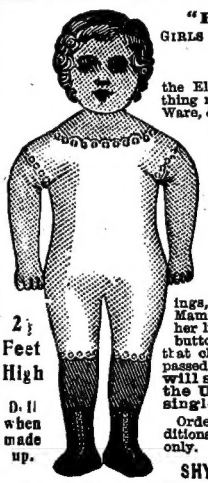

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Short Stories

No. 779.] [One Penny.

For the Week Ending December 5th, 1903.

"TIDDLES."

A Very Pretty Story telling how a Little Girl Managed to Make Four Persons Happy.

"But I have no time for that sort of thing."

The speaker, a man with a strong, resolute, somewhat weary face moved restlessly in his chair as if to escape from the clear, direct gaze the girl he addressed turned upon him. She had a way of looking at him, this girl, which was rather disconcerting—a way which demanded the exact truth, and, as he confessed to himself—perhaps reluctantly—got it. It was almost impossible, looking into her face with its many changeable expressions—at one moment brimming over with fun and mischief, the next, sad with the ready sympathy accorded by all true womanly natures—to prevaricate. She took life rather seriously this little girl, in spite of the fun and mischief, which would bubble over at times, and there was a certain look in her deep violet eyes which told of a nature which might prove worth sounding. That thought passed through the man's mind as she gazed at him, as if trying to reckon up the exact meaning of his last words. They had been speaking of love, those two, and with a certain impatience with which a man of the world who has passed his first youth will treat the subject he repeated:

"No—I have no time for that sort of thing."

"Why?" she asked in the simple, direct way he had grown accustomed to during the last few days.

"Because my work must come first with me," he answered.

"Then you are ambitious," said the girl.

"Yes"—with a hardening of the lines on his face which told of a fight hardly won, which also showed the indomitable spirit of the man—a look which might spell "bend" if necessary, but not "break." Then, with a sudden change in his voice which appealed to the girl at once, he said:

"My mother died worn out soon after she was thirty because my father possessed no ambition."

"Yes," she said softly, "I understand."

Looking at the small earnest face turned almost pityingly towards him, the man felt that she did understand, and a sense of comradeship not often experienced crept over him, making him wonder if she might not be right when she said:

"But do you not think it is a pity to miss all the best things of life, to be always alone, to have no one to care whether your work goes well or ill?"

As she spoke another face rose in the man's mind, a face beautiful enough, indeed far surpassing that of the girl by his side, but without its indefinable charm—cold, proud, self-possessed—fitted in every way, so people said, to be the wife of the rising barrister, Ralph Carrington. No! he should not always be "alone," but apart from the position he could give her, would Beatrice Cangham care "whether his work went well or ill?"

He checked the impatient sigh which rose to his lips and also the half-formed thought that he would tell his "little friend," as he called Nina Beaumont—of his bride who was to be—of the marriage which was to take place in the summer—a marriage which was "so suitable," so his friends said, "which would be such a help to him in his profession," in which, as he told himself half in pride, half in contempt, *love* had no part. No! he was leaving Parkfield Manor in a few days; why spoil those days by speaking or thinking of a future which had never been too attractive and which now, somehow, seemed less so than ever. He turned to the girl who was still gazing at him with grave, earnest eyes:

"So you think I am missing the best things in life, little one, do you?"

"I think so," she said simply; then, with that quick change of mood which was one of her chief charms, she said merrily:

"But come, 'My lord,' listen to that waltz; do you know you asked me for it a quarter of an hour ago? It is not worth much, if it is not worth the taking, eh?"

Rising with alacrity as he thought of several waltzes with this same small person which had a way of recurring to him, as delightful experiences, they left the conservatory and were soon floating down the room to the strains of the "Valse Bleue."

* * * * *

Ralph Carrington sat in the smoke room at Parkfield Manor, and as he puffed the smoke-rings above his head, with a persistence worthy of a better cause, his thoughts travelled

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back over the last fortnight, to the day when, turning out of his London chambers, he had bumped into his old college chum, Arthur Maitland, a man whom he had not met for the last four years, but of whose friendship he felt as sure as if they had seen each other daily. As Arthur would have said—they had been great "pals" at college—"what the dickens have you been doing to yourself?" had been that gentleman's greeting after a grip of his friend's hand, the intensity of which would have brought tears to the eyes of any ordinary person. "You look as if you had taken a ticket for Kingdom Come!"

"Shouldn't mind much if I had," he remembered saying—for he had reached that stage when nothing seems to matter and a doctor would have said he was suffering from a severe attack of "nerves" consequent on overwork and want of change.

"Look here, old chap," said Maitland, "you're overdoing it; throw musty law books and 'cases' to the winds, or otherwise get someone to look after them for you, and come down to Parkfield. The wife would be glad to see you, I'm sure, and we have all sorts of gaieties on the go for Christmas; you've never been introduced to 'Tiddles,' have you? That would do you good in itself—wake you up, you know."

Wondering who or what "Tiddles" might be, Ralph Carrington had promised to "look them up" and "stay until he felt better." He had been looking forward to a lonely Christmas, for Beatrice Cangham was abroad with her aunt, who objected to spending the winter in London with all its smuts and fogs. They were in Egypt, and only intended coming home in time for preparations for the wedding which was to take place the latter part of June.

From time to time Carrington received long descriptive letters filled with accounts of their gaieties—their stay at Cairo, of the dance at "Shephead's," which had been such a huge success, the ride to the Pyramids with Sir Roland North in attendance. The good time they had on board the *Rameses* going up the Nile, the moonlight expedition to Thebes—how wonderful the ruins were—everything, it seemed to him, but interest in himself and his doings. He had never seemed to notice how wrapped up in herself the girl was, until, worn-out and overdone, on the brink of illness, he had felt the want of a woman's sympathy. "Nina will do him good," thought little "Mrs. Arthur," as she preferred being called—when he turned up at Parkfield as he had promised on Christmas Eve, and Nina *had* "done him good." Little by little he found himself confiding in the girl, telling her all his plans and prospects, and very much to his own amusement at times, wondering whether she would approve of this or that.

How well he remembered turning round in response to Mrs. Arthur's "let me introduce you to my sister, Mr. Carrington," to see a small fair girl with wonderful violet eyes heavily fringed with lashes several shades darker than her hair—eyes which would have redeemed many a plainer face without the aid of the sunny locks, which rippled back from that face, in such luxurious profusion. A dainty little maiden, simply gowned in white, with a knot of her favourite violets at her waistband. She was a refreshing change to the usual run of girls Ralph Carrington met on those rare occasions when he could be induced to accept one of the many invitations which poured upon him. Girls, whose one aim seemed to be that of drawing a wealthy prize in the matrimonial market, and whose efforts in that direction were so palpable as to very often defeat their own object. He thought of the merry skating parties when he and Nina had skimmed through the frosty air together, for after a day or two of what Mrs. Arthur called her "petting," he began to feel himself again and, with the incentive which Nina's society provided, a keener enjoyment of life than he had felt for years took possession of him.

He felt to have gone back ten years, to have lost that feeling of "oldness" which had oppressed him so much, making him feel like a man of fifty-nine, instead of thirty-nine. Then there were the carpet dances, when two or three of the younger members of the neighbouring families had dropped in, sure of a welcome at Parkfield. One or two quiet evenings—and Carrington thought he had enjoyed those best of all—when he and Arthur had sat listening to the "girls" singing, for in spite of "Tiddles," who turned out to be "Miss Maitland"—a lovely, precocious little piece of humanity aged ten—Arthur Maitland always spoke and thought of his wife as a girl. They had all driven over to the Hunt Ball the night before, and Ralph wondered that he had enjoyed it so much—no! after all, did he wonder? Was it not all summed up in a few words? Three or four waltzes with a slender figure, which seemed to float through the air, in his arms. Desultory chats in the conservatory—what was it she had said, that he was "missing the best things of life," so he was—and with a deep sigh, which was almost a groan, Ralph Carrington realised that to him the best thing in life meant Nina Beaumont.

Downstairs in the drawing-room below Mr. and Mrs. Arthur were holding what at first was a very one-sided discussion on the Hunt Ball. "What a lovely gown Lady Gower had on," began Mrs. Arthur, addressing the furniture presumably—for to all intents and purposes Arthur appeared to be asleep in the armchair, "trying to get up to himself," he called it, after last night's dissipation. Something which sounded like a grunt came from the depths of the chair.

"It must have cost a little fortune," went on Mrs. Arthur, nothing abashed by the unresponsiveness of her lord and master—another grunt. "I wonder if Mr. Wardroper and Phyllis Carstairs intend making a match of it?" went on the little lady, trying another tack. "He seemed to pay her very marked attention" (no answer to this). "She is a lovely girl, but I thought there were some very pretty girls there taking them all round, didn't you, Arthur?"

"Nina looked as decent as anybody," came in a sleepy sort of growl, which said as plainly as possible, "do be quiet."

"Oh, yes, of course," briskly. "Nina always does look lovely."

There was silence after this for a few minutes, for Mrs. Arthur's thoughts were busy with an idea which had come into her head the night before, as she caught sight of Ralph and Nina dancing together. There was a look on the man's face which to the wise little woman could only mean one thing. He had lost his heart to that pretty little sister of hers, she felt sure, and she was simply "aching" to tell Arthur all about it. Like all happily married women, she was a real match-maker at heart; but, as she knew by experience, Arthur always pooh-poohed anything of the sort, and was apt to meet her little confidences with advice as to "minding her own business" and so on. Like a wise general, then, she skirted round the subject warily.

"I think Mr. Carrington enjoyed the dance last night, don't you, Arthur?"

"Should think so," still more than half asleep.

"He looks heaps better for coming," persisted she.

"Yes! he is better; talks about going back to London soon"—with a yawn, but signs of gradually returning to a fit state for rational conversation.

"I don't think he will though," said Mrs. Arthur in a tone which invited the question which followed.

"Why, dearie?"

"Well"—with a knowing look—"I think he is beginning to think he has been a bachelor long enough, and quite right too—he is far too nice not to have a dear little wife of his own!"

"What makes you say that, Nettie?"

"Because"—launching her bombshell now that she saw he was interested—"I think he is in love with Nina!"

"Ye gods!" give me a woman for making a romance out of nothing," laughed Arthur; "in love, with Nina indeed; he's engaged to a Miss Cangley, or Cangham, or something of that sort. I remember him writing to tell me about it, oh, twelve months ago—no, little woman" (kissing his wife's disappointed face), "you're wrong this time. Of course he likes her——"

"Yes, he does, papa," broke in a childish voice from the deep-seated window where, unnoticed by her parents, and half concealed by the curtains, "Tiddles" had been busily dressing her doll.

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"I know he likes Auntie Nina, because I saw him kissing her photograph in the breakfast room just now." After which calm delivery of *her* bombshell, "Tiddles" went quietly on with her business.

"Oh, 'Tiddles,'" said her mother after an uncontrollable glance of triumph at Arthur. "You should not say such naughty things; Mr. Carrington would be looking at Aunt Nina's photograph, not kissing it."

"Yes, he did look at it, mamma, for ever so long and then he said 'my darling,' quite low down, and then he kissed it three times, because I counted," persisted "Tiddles" who was nothing if not accurate.

Mrs. Arthur bit her lips in an almost hopeless endeavour not to laugh as the child looked up into her face with great solemn blue eyes, and said:

"I *know* he likes Auntie Nina," cried Tiddles, "because I saw him kissing her photograph."

"'Tiddles,' "if ever you say anything like that again about Mr. Carrington I shall be obliged to make you stay in the nursery; little girls should not talk in that way—it is very rude; go to nurse at once."

"Tiddles" gathered up her precious doll in her arms and with an expression of injured dignity on her face walked towards the door, turning round, however, before she reached it to say, "He did, mamma, really he did!"

* * * * *

Mrs. Arthur did not belong to that disagreeable order of women who take a delight in saying, "I told you so," which is invariably so annoying to the person "told," and in addition is like adding insult to injury, but on this occasion that was the remark which fell from her lips, adding to it:

"You'll perhaps think I'm right now."

Arthur simply did not know what to think and plainly showed the state of his feelings by giving vent to a long expressive whistle under his breath. "Great Scott!" came next, and whatever may be the meaning of that ejaculation, it seemed to relieve his mind and also put his tongue into working order, for he said:

"I say, Nettie, it's about time he went back to London, for if he is in love with Nina, and I begin to think there may be something in your idea after all, he'll be in a beastly hole. Poor old Ralph, he was never much of a hand at love making, and if he gets properly into Cupid's clutches he'll take it very seriously like everything else he does."

"Yes, not like a dear old boy I know, who imagined every girl he met was his fate," put in Mrs. Arthur with a peck which was meant to be a kiss, somewhere near the top of her husband's head.

"Well, he was right once, wasn't he, old girl"—pulling her on to his knee where she nestled very contentedly, for Arthur Maitland and his wife were lovers still in spite of several years of married life, or, perhaps, because of it.

After a moment's silence Mrs. Arthur reopened the subject by saying:

"But what about that engagement? I can't make it out."

"Nor can I," said her husband. "He has never mentioned it; I answered his letter, telling me of it, of course, and he has not thought it necessary to speak of the fact since he came here. You see, we men have no back hair to brush out in each other's rooms, and don't get so confidential on those subjects"—stroking his wife's curly head as he spoke.

"I wonder what Nina thinks about him?" went on Mrs. Arthur.

"Oh, that he's a decent sort," said Arthur carelessly—then with a sudden thought: "Look here, little woman, don't you be putting ideas into the child's head. She's all right now and it's as well to let sleeping dogs lie. Ralph will go back in a day or two, and as far as he is concerned, he is old enough to look after himself, but I don't want Nina made unhappy." In common with most people Arthur had a very warm corner in his heart for his little sister-in-law, and truth to tell, would have thought Ralph Carrington a very lucky man to have won her. He was about to say as much to his wife when the welcome clatter of cups and saucers was heard, and the footman appeared with the tea-tray followed in a few moments by Nina and Carrington themselves.

The girl looked very lovely in her dark furs with a closely fitting toque of velvet—the colour of which exactly matched her eyes and was rivalled again by the violets she had tucked into her muff. The keen frosty air had brought a faint colour into her cheeks, and loosened the sunny curls which clustered in bewitching tendrils round her face and ears. Ralph had seen her coming up the drive from the breakfast room window, and, knowing that she would go to the drawing-room for her usual cup of tea, had hastened to meet her there. He had come to the conclusion that, as a man of honour, it was impossible to stay much longer at Parkfield, for to see more of Nina and not betray his feelings, he knew would tax him to the uttermost. He must make some excuse and leave—he would say Saturday. To-day was Tuesday, just four more days for a glimpse of happiness "that might have been," she would be none the worse, and he—well, he was not the only man who has found that the gate leading to earth's fairest garden must be passed if he would keep pure that Heavenly flower which is given to all, but is so often blighted before it blossoms to fullest perfection—honour.

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"Wherever have you been, Nina?" said Mrs. Arthur with a glance of fond admiration at the girl, as she cast aside her hat and coat, and sank into a low chair. "You make me absolutely tired by displaying such energy after dancing until the small hours of the morning; we have all been so lazy, haven't we, Arthur?"

"Well, I have, I admit," he answered, "and if you call talking nineteen to the dozen laziness, you'll come out a very fair second—as for Ralph, ask him to give an account of himself."

Ralph smiled as he handed the girl a cup of tea and said: "No, Miss Beaumont must give an account of herself first."

"Come," said Mrs. Arthur; "obey orders, Nina."

"Oh, I have only been to the top of the hill just to get the cobwebs blown away, Nettie," said the girl, with a happy smile playing about her lips. Life seemed all sunshine just now, and she did not realise how much Ralph Carrington had to do with the fact, or how quickly the clouds may gather and burst.

"Cobwebs indeed," said Mrs. Arthur, "then if you have got rid of yours, you shall sing ours away, when I have given you another cup of tea."

Nina smiled and sat quietly listening to the two men who were discussing a celebrated law case at that time filling the papers. They had different opinions on it, and as Nina noticed how rapidly and quietly Ralph demolished all his friend's arguments, she thought, no wonder people spoke of him as "clever."

"I should not care to be your opposing counsel, Mr. Carrington," she said. "You have not much mercy for the other side."

"Possibly if you were I might be more lenient," said he with a look in his eyes which made her heart beat more quickly, she scarcely knew why—"but did I not hear something about your singing just now?"

Nina rose, and, going to the piano, picked up the first song she came to, which was Guy D'Hardelot's setting of Victor Hugo's beautiful lines "Sans Toi."

"Oh, do sing that, Nina, it's just lovely," said Mrs. Arthur.

As the girl's full rich contralto voice rang through the room, the song appealed to Ralph as music had never done before, passionately fond of it though he was, and with the last lines "What are tears without thine eyes, or my lips without thy kiss?" the determination to leave Parkfield at once took possession of him. Would it not be better to face the truth, admit that he was, after all events—in this thing weak-minded, not sure of himself, that bound in honour to one woman, he, Ralph Carrington, who had always prided himself on his self-control, was afraid of betraying himself to the woman whom too late he found was the one real love of his life.

That night, as the two men sat in the smoking room, Ralph in an odd, abrupt sort of way told Arthur of his intention to leave before breakfast the next morning.

"Make my apologies, and say 'Good-bye' to the ladies, old man—I will write to Mrs. Arthur and thank her personally for all her kindness."

"Look here, Carrington," broke in Arthur, "what's all this rubbish about? There's nothing happened that you need rush off like this, I'm sure!"

Half in despair that he should be unable to get away if he did not explain to his blundering, kindhearted friend—and half in relief, Ralph told Arthur everything, in a few simple well-chosen words, which made that gentleman wring his friend's hand with a curious "lumpy" feeling in his throat which he relieved by muttering something to the effect that "some people did make awful fools of themselves!" However, he drove Ralph to the station himself the next morning, entering the breakfast room just as Nina appeared with "Tiddles" in attendance for their usual half-past nine breakfast.

"Where is Mr. Carrington?" said Mrs. Arthur. "You and he have been early birds this morning, Arthur."

"Yes," said her husband, instinctively averting his eyes from Nina's face. "He has had to get back to London, and I've been to the station with him to catch the eight-thirty train."

"Gone back to London," echoed Mrs. Arthur, "why he—— he——"

"Yes," broke in Arthur, "he left all sorts of nice messages for you girls, and he's going to write to you, Nettie, and say pretty things about how much he enjoyed himself, and so on."

"I do think he might have told me last night," began Mrs. Arthur, and then something in Arthur's expression stopped her and she glanced at Nina—the girl's face was white and strained and she sat perfectly still with a look almost of bewilderment on her face. For some minutes she said nothing and then in a tremulous voice, which she tried in vain to keep calm and steady, she simply remarked:

"I am glad Mr. Carrington enjoyed his visit."

As soon as Arthur could escape from the room he did so, and Nettie, crossing over to her sister, said:

"What is it, darling? Oh, *don't* look like that!"

The girl's lips quivered piteously for a moment and then, utterly unnerved by the sympathy expressed in every line of Nettie's face, she cried:

"Oh, Nettie, Nettie, I know I ought not to say it, for Ralph has never spoken to me, but I love him—I love him, and I thought—Oh, how ashamed I am"—breaking off and hiding her burning face in her hands.

"Nina," said Nettie, laying a caressing hand on her sister's shoulder. "Don't say that, dear, there is no need to be ashamed, for I, too, thought—nay, I am sure that Ralph does love you, and I think that is why he left so hurriedly this morning."

"But why should he?" began Nina, lifting a tear-stained face.

"My darling," said Nettie, "Arthur told me only yesterday, he is engaged to a Miss Cangham, and they are to be married in the summer."

Nina buried her face in her hands and for some time there was no sound in the room but her sobs. Mrs. Arthur let her cry on, thinking perhaps it was the best relief she could have, and after a while the girl pushed her hair from her face and with a brave attempt at a smile, which brought tears to Nettie's eyes said, "Forgive me this once, Nettie, I shall be all right now." But Nettie thought as she left the room that it would be many a day before she saw the old light-hearted Nina again. Unconsciously she spoke out the thought:

"Oh, if he had only been free; how happy they might have been."

"Tiddles" had all this time been an unthought of spectator of the little scene, and with wide open eyes and ears, was trying to put two and two together in her own little mind. She electrified her mother by saying:

"I think Auntie Nina is very silly to cry because Mr. Carrington has gone away, mamma, and because she loves him."

"Well, you see, darling, he has somebody else to love him, and he must go and talk to her"—lightly, in a vain endeavour to stop the child's chatter.

"Yes, but why doesn't he tell his Miss Cangham he wants to talk to Auntie Nina, mamma, and then he could come back again, couldn't he?"

"Hush, hush, my pet, you know nothing about it." But "Tiddles" thought she did and perhaps she was wiser in her own generation than we think.

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When Ralph Carrington arrived at his chambers in town he found waiting for him a letter from Beatrice Cangham, saying that her aunt, Lady Leslie, in her accustomed erratic way, had suddenly made up her mind that she was tired of roaming about, and with that want of consideration for other people's plans which usually characterised her actions, announced her intentions of returning by the next boat. "We shall spend a short time in Paris to do some necessary shopping," wrote Beatrice, "but in any case shall be in London in February. We intend to take rooms at the Hyde Park Hotel for a while, for auntie is going to have the house in Upper Belgrave Street done up before we go into it. I think she might have stayed another fortnight; there is so much going on here and everything will be so abominably flat in London."

Not a word to say she would be pleased to see him, or any suggestion of their making arrangements together for their future home. He wondered if she ever gave it a thought of any sort, and as was so often the case with him now, had resolutely to put aside the picture of Nina in that home. Oh, the irony of it all. Could it be right to put pure happiness on one side in this way? For though no coxcomb, Ralph had a feeling deep down in his heart that, had he been free to do so, he could have won Nina's love.

It was in a far from enviable frame of mind then, that he found his way to the Hyde Park Hotel one bright frosty morning towards the end of February. He had received a telegram telling him of the travellers' arrival there, and made up his mind that he would see Beatrice at once and ask her to hurry on the preparations for their wedding, for he thought once married he might be able to get rid of this miserable feeling of unrest.

He found Beatrice and her aunt in a whirl of excitement booked knee-deep for "this" and "that," for, as Beatrice explained, Sir Roland North had travelled home with them and was "so kind." "His mother had sent them an invitation to Wetherby Grange and she thought they might go—anything would be better than London in February, didn't Ralph think so?" and so on.

Ralph wearily assented and was wondering how he could best broach the subject uppermost in his mind, when a childish voice full of excitement fell on his ear, reminding him irresistibly of Parkfield. "Oh, mamma, are we really going to see the *Babes in the Wood?* —how lovely!" the voice said, and when it was answered by one he recognised as Mrs. Maitland's, he astonished Beatrice by exclaiming, "Why, that's 'Tiddles' —excuse me"—and, springing to the door he re-entered a few moments later with that small maiden and her mother in attendance.

When the mutual introductions were exchanged, Mrs. Arthur explained that Arthur had important business with his solicitors, and they were staying for a couple of days. As his time would be taken up so much during the day, she had brought "Tiddles" as a companion, for Nina was anything but well, and could not come up as she had intended, to search for new "chiffons."

"What is the matter with Miss Beaumont? Nothing serious, I hope?" said Ralph in a low tone.

"No, I thinks she wants a change—has got run down," said Mrs. Arthur; "we are going to the Riviera next week; I think it will do her good." All this time Lady Leslie was talking to "Tiddles," highly amused and attracted by the child's chatter and sweet winsome face.

"Mrs. Maitland," said she, "'Tiddles' says she will come and have tea with me if you will allow her to do so, and tell me all about the *Babes in the Wood*. You will join us, I hope?"

But Mrs. Maitland could not do so, "she had promised to meet Arthur in Regent Street before returning for dinner, "but I will bring 'Tiddles' in if you like, Lady Leslie, and she may stay with you until we get back, then it will be bed time for all little girls who have been busy, eh, 'Tiddles'?" So it was arranged and "Tiddles" went on her way rejoicing.

"Is that Mr. Carrington's Miss Cangham?" she asked her mother as soon as they got outside, for 'Tiddles' had never forgotten the day when Auntie Nina had cried so much, and had firmly made up her mind that Miss Cangham ought to know all about it. When her mother said "Yes, 'Tiddles,' that lady and Mr. Carrington are going to be married some day," a thoughtful look settled down on her little face, and she had not so much to say about the doings of the "Babes" as was her wont on such occasions.

The three left behind parted company soon afterwards, for Ralph felt utterly out of cue with the gay chatter going on, and finding it impossible to speak to Beatrice alone, left them, promising to look them up early the next day and spend a long day with them. Soon after he had gone, and Lady Leslie was taking her usual afternoon siesta, letters were handed in, amongst them one for Beatrice from Sir Roland North. A straightforward, manly letter, telling her of his love for her, "hoping that she was not quite indifferent to him, and that she would one day become his wife, would she send him word at once that he might come to London and receive his answer personally."

The girl sat with his letter in her hand, a troubled look on her usually impassive face. In addition to his title, which she did not attempt to disguise was attractive to her, she felt more at ease with him than with Ralph, realised that he did not see through her little weaknesses and ambitions so easily, in fact, that what little heart she possessed was given to him;

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the letter was not altogether unexpected; indeed, during the pleasant journey home, it had troubled her more than once as to what her answer would have to be when the inevitable question was asked, for needless to say, Sir Roland knew nothing of her engagement to Ralph.

It was this mixture of feelings which caused her to be so much more talkative than usual during Ralph's visit, which had made her so resolutely avoid a *tête-à-tête* with him, and now—what should she do? Could she make up her mind to tell him the whole truth? If it had been love, and love alone, which prompted her inclinations, she felt she might have done so, but Beatrice Cangham owned the truth even to herself, and she knew that the prospect of being mistress of Weatherby Grange—able to take her position as Lady North—meant more to her than that she should win a noble-hearted English gentleman to be her companion through life.

She dreaded Ralph's keen insight—the scorn which would come into his face, for although they had never professed any great affection for each other, she thought he cared for her, as much as he ever would for any woman, as indeed he had, until he met Nina. She took the letter to her room, altogether undecided how to act, forgetting all about the fact that her aunt had asked "Tiddles" to come back to tea. Mrs. Maitland had rushed in from the matinée, as usual at the very last minute, and being afraid she would miss her appointment with Arthur, instructed her maid to make "Tiddles" tidy, and take her to room No. 14, where she was to take tea with Lady Leslie.

When "Tiddles" arrived, therefore, in all the glory of freshly-tied hair, and pretty frock, it was to find an empty room and no hostess; the child, in quaint imitation of her mother, said:

"You may go, Jenkins, I will wait here for Lady Leslie."

The maid, a simple country girl, scarcely knew what to do, but thinking her charge could not come to much harm, left her, after many warnings "to be good and not touch anything till the lady came."

For fully one minute the little one sat perfectly still, and then, as was only natural, became restless, and started a tour round the room which might have been disastrous in many ways if her attention had not been arrested by a tiny table in the window, upon which were pen, paper, and ink, which plainly told "Tiddles" to write something."

"I'll write and tell Miss Cangham all about it," she thought.

To think with "Tiddles" was to act. Drawing up a chair she wrote:

DERE MISS CANGHAM—*Auntie Nina says she loves Mister Carinton and he likes her, becaws I saw him kiss her fotograph in the brekfast room, so I think you had better let him come back and live with us.*

Yours obedintly,

TIDDLES MAITLAND.

Folding this, she put it into an envelope, and in a larger round hand than ever addressed it to "Miss Cangham." She was wondering what to do next, when Jenkins, who had been uneasy, knocked at the door to ask if Miss "Tiddles" was all right, and finding she was still alone, bore her off, much to her disgust, to their own apartments.

Thus it was that when Beatrice came down for a cup of tea, she found this note, which was to alter the course of four lives. She picked it up idly, and, noticing the superscription, wondered how it got there and what it could mean. With her thoughts full of her own affairs, it was not until she had read it several times, that it bore any meaning for her. "Auntie Nina, Mr. Carrington, Tiddles Maitland," she repeated to herself, trying in vain to read the puzzle. All at once the truth flashed upon her and she remembered that Ralph had been staying with the Maitlands while she was abroad. Who Auntie Nina was, she neither knew or cared, but evidently the child "Tiddles," whom she now remembered was to have taken tea with them, had been in the room during her absence, and for some reason or other had written this note. Ah, if it could but be true: no, it *must* be true; here was a way out of her difficulties. Once again she read the quaint epistle, laughing out loud at the phrase "I saw him kiss her fotograph." Fancy dear, staid old Ralph (she felt quite fond of him again now), kissing anyone's photograph. But to business. Taking a sheet of notepaper she simply wrote "Come and see me.—Yours, Beatrice." and addressed the envelope "Sir Roland North, Wetherby Grange, Wetherby." Then after thinking awhile she also wrote:

DEAR RALPH—*If the inclosed note means anything you will be able to wish me joy in my engagement to Sir Roland North, with all sincerity; if not, will you still do so for the sake of "Auld Lang Syne," knowing that I think it will be best for us to live our lives apart and that I am only waiting to hear from you to say that I will become his wife. I have no hesitation in writing this for something tells me that "Auntie Nina" has found a way to your heart which I could never have done. Hoping this is so for your sake, believe me, your erring and repentant friend,*

BEATRICE CANGHAM.

Inclosing the note "Tiddles" had written with such laborious care, she sent a messenger with it to Ralph's club, telling him to wait for an answer. Ralph, however, was not there, and she had to "possess her soul in patience" as best she might. On Lady Leslie's appearance, which was only just before dinner was served, she was shocked to find she had forgotten all about her "little friend," and sent round to Mrs. Maitland's rooms to ask if it was too late for her to pay her promised visit. But "Tiddles" was preparing for the land of dreams, and her mother thought she had better leave it until to-morrow. They had dined and were just preparing to go to "His Majesty's" where Tree was playing in *Resurrection*, when Ralph rushed in. The girl looked miserably confused when she saw him, but one glance at his radiant face reassured her, and she said: "Oh, Ralph, I am so glad. Why did you not tell me about 'Auntie' before?"

After a few hurried words of explanation from both, and a hand-shake on Ralph's part which told Beatrice what a heavy load had been taken from his mind, Ralph took up his hat and coat—if he caught the next train he could be at Parkfield by half-past nine and he felt he could not rest until he had seen Nina. When he arrived there he brushed past the astonished footman in the hall, saying:

"You need not announce me, Barnes, I will go to Miss Beaumont in the drawing-room, she is alone you say?"

Ah! she was singing—what was that? "What are tears without thine eyes or my lips without thy kiss?"

The voice died away in a vain tremulous attempt to keep it steady, and it was almost more than Ralph could bear, when, putting her head on her arms, she leant forward on the piano with a sob and a low "Ah, Ralph, Ralph——"

"My darling, my darling, come to me," he said, moving slightly out of the shadowy corner, where, overcome with the passion of feeling which surged through him, he had waited for the conclusion of the song. She turned, and seeing him there with arms outstretched, and a face full of passionate love and tenderness, took one step forward, to be folded once and for always, to that true strong heart, which, finding her, had found its own true mate.

Billy Lamb.

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The Missing Brides.

The Story of a Strange Adventure.

At last Belding Hall was to be occupied. Once more it was to become the abode of men and women, instead of a home for owls and bats.

For thirty years its gloomy chambers had been closed, and the light of the sun excluded from its halls. Grass had grown over the walks, and weeds and bushes hedged the building in on every side; while the trees spread their sheltering arms about its upper stories, shielding the chimneys, cornices, and roof from the blasts of winter, and the scorching heat of summer.

Some of the window-shutters had fallen from their hinges, and the doors had shrunk from the door frames, as if fearing contact with them. Ruin had set its mark on everything, increasing its hold from year to year, until it now reigned supreme.

But all this was to be changed. Robert Belding, the heir to the estate, contemplated marriage, and was going to bring his blushing bride to the home which had been bequeathed to him by his uncle, Maxwell Belding.

The house had been in the possession of the family for over a hundred years, having been built by Robert's great-grandfather. Maxwell Belding had intended to make it his residence, and thirty years before our story opens, the friends of the family had assembled at the hall to celebrate his marriage to Grace Atherton, the belle of the county.

But Fate had decreed that he should not partake of the cup of wedded bliss; for, at the last moment, when all were breathlessly awaiting the entrance of the bride and bridegroom, a commotion was heard among the bridesmaids, and soon it was whispered from lip to lip that Grace had disappeared.

She had left the chamber above, a few minutes before, for the purpose of going to the library, or study, where hung Grandma Belding's portrait, taken when she was first married, seventy years before. Grandma had been noted for her many virtues and accomplishments, as well as for her devotion to her husband. It had been a custom of the family for many years, when a wedding occurred, for the bride to kiss Grandma's portrait; the old servants stoutly affirming that she who did so would be blessed with a constant and adoring husband, and her married life would be one of peace and happiness.

In deference to the family tradition, Maxwell had laughingly escorted Grace to the door of the library, and then left her; as, to insure the blessing of the departed dame, it was said that the aspiring bride must be alone when she sought the coveted favour.

Several moments passed, and then Maxwell went to the door, and entered the room. It was empty. He gazed about in bewilderment. Grace was nowhere visible.

The light shone dimly from the chandelier. He lighted more candles, and hurriedly examined every part of the room. The window stood open, and he stepped out on the balcony. Grace was not there. Not a sound was to be heard, save the distant voices of the guests in the hall below. Where had she gone? What could it mean? He spoke her name gently, then louder. There was no reply.

Five minutes passed, then ten, but not until fifteen minutes had elapsed did Maxwell collect his thoughts sufficiently to give the alarm. In a moment everything was in confusion. Frightened bridesmaids ran from room to room, calling Grace's name; but the only answers they received were the echoes of their own voices.

The grounds were carefully searched, but not a trace of the missing Grace was found. Quickly it was whispered among the guests that she had fled with a lover, whose existence Maxwell had never suspected. Whether this was the true solution of the mystery, no one knew; for Maxwell never saw her face again after kissing her good-bye at the library door.

Silently the bridal party dispersed. The luxurious dwelling prepared for the reception of Maxwell Belding's bride was closed, the doors and windows nailed up, and he went abroad—no one knew whither.

For ten years he travelled, trying in vain to forget his lost bride. Then he returned to England and took up his abode in London, where the remaining twenty years of his life were devoted to the practice of his profession—the law. He died, apparently a man of eighty, although scarcely sixty years of age, bequeathing his property to his nephew, Robert Belding, with the provision that he was to marry before he attained the age of thirty, and that the ceremony should be celebrated at the old mansion, where the happy couple were to reside permanently.

This brings us back to the beginning of our story.

Robert Belding had just passed with high honours at Oxford, and inheriting, as he did, the immense wealth of Maxwell Belding, he was an object of considerable interest to the people in the village. Nothing was talked of but the coming wedding and the opening of the old Hall, which had so long been an eyesore to the community.

One day Robert Belding arrived, accompanied by an army of carpenters, bricklayers, plasterers and paper-hangers, and at once began a vigorous assault on the infirmities of Belding Hall. In a few months a wonderful change took place in the building and surrounding grounds. Every sign of neglect and decay was effaced, and the house stood forth in all its ancient splendour. Once more lights flashed from its windows, the sound of laughter was heard in its rooms, and again wedding guests assembled beneath its roof.

Robert Belding had carried out every wish of his deceased uncle with the utmost fidelity. The old library presented almost the same appearance it had done twenty years before. Grandma Belding's picture hung in precisely the same place; in fact, it could not well be otherwise, as its frame was a part of the oaken wall. It had not been removed, but simply dusted and left where it had hung so many years.

As the happy couple stood at the head of the stairs, about

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to descend to the drawing-room, where the invited guests were awaiting their coming, Robert laughingly asked the blushing Laura whether she wished to pay homage to Grandma Belding's portrait, and invoke the blessing of the deceased lady on the step she was about to take.

"Oh, Robert!" she exclaimed. "Do you wish to lose me, as Uncle Maxwell did his beloved Grace?"

"No fear of that!" answered Robert gaily. "There is no lover concealed in the shrubbery to spirit my fair one away. Are you afraid?"

"Afraid? Of what should I be afraid?"

"Nothing at all, my darling. Perhaps it would be well to respect the family traditions and customs, and if you wish to solicit the goodwill of the lady whose household virtues have been the admiration of the female members of our family for the last hundred years, signify your desire, and I am ready to conduct you to the shrine where you may offer up your petitions."

Laura laughingly took his arm; and, amid the raillery of the bridesmaids, and sundry cautions not to lose his bride, Robert led her gently to the library.

They entered together. A fire burnt brightly in the grate, and the lamps in the chandelier cast a brilliant light over the room. They glanced at the portrait, and the lovely face seemed to beam kindly upon them, as though in approbation of their union.

"I hope your life will be as happy and serene as was hers," said Robert tenderly, as he stooped to kiss her. "We must lose no time, as they are waiting for us. I will wait outside the door."

Then he left her.

Alone, Laura approached the portrait. It stood considerably higher than her head; and, in order to reach it, she was obliged to step upon a low shelf, or projection, about a foot from the floor. The shelf was only about three feet in length, by two feet in width, and was used as a receptacle for magazines and newspapers.

Pushing aside a pile of magazines, she stepped upon the shelf, her hands clasping the sides of the frame; and, rising on tiptoe, she reverently touched her lips to the canvas, devoutly breathing a prayer for the future happiness of herself and husband.

As the words died on her lips she felt a slight jar, a creaking and grinding noise sounded in her ears, the wall seemed to yawn before her, and a breath of damp, musty air to sweep over her; then the room appeared to float around her, and she became confused.

Shriek after shriek burst from her terrified lips. In a few moments she heard Robert's voice calling.

"Laura! Laura! Where are you? What has happened? Answer me!"

The words sounded muffled and distant, and the room was in total darkness. The sound of his voice restored her as she was on the point of swooning, and she replied, faintly:

"Oh, Robert! I am standing on the shelf before Grandma Belding's picture; but the light is out, and I am so cold! And what makes your voice sound so far away?"

"The light is not out, Laura; it is burning as brightly as ever; but I cannot see you at all. The shelf in front of the picture is quite empty; your voice seems to come from it, although it sounds distant and indistinct."

A moment later he spoke quickly:

"Laura, do not be alarmed; I see through the whole mystery now. Don't stir a step. The picture has simply turned round, and you are on the other side of it. A portion of the wall appears to be on pivots. A magazine has been caught in the joint, which keeps the panel from fitting closely. Be patient, and don't feel at all frightened. I will call help, and soon release you."

A few moments passed; then she heard a confused murmur of voices, some calling to her to keep up her courage and be a brave girl, and others giving commands and making suggestions, and intreating others to do things which they never seemed to think of doing themselves. At last someone called for a crowbar; and presently a stream of light flashed in her eyes as the heavy crowbar was forced into the opening, and the panel swung slowly back.

But long before it had regained its place she was snatched from her unpleasant position by Robert's strong arms, and transferred to those of the excited bridesmaids, who covered her with kisses, and wept over her as if she had just been rescued from the grave.

And so she had. For had not the magazine been caught in the closing panel, leaving an opening through which her voice reached Robert's listening ear, she would have been buried as effectually as though laid away in the family vault.

In a short time order was restored, and the festivities proceeded, although the bride was very pale, and the bridegroom a little more quiet and subdued than he had been an hour before. But they were very happy, and thankful for the kind Providence which had interposed between Laura and the dreadful fate that had overtaken Grace.

The next morning workmen again came to Belding Hall, and a certain picture was, after much manœuvring, induced to swing upon its concealed hinges, revealing a dark opening in the wall, from which a very steep flight of stairs led to a chamber below. At the bottom of the staircase they found something which caused their faces to blanch and their hearts to swell with emotion.

A skeleton lay there, attired in bridal robes—all that remained of Grace Atherton, Maxwell Belding's lost bride; snatched from his arms almost at the altar, her heart filled with the exquisite joy that belongs only to the fond woman who bestows her heart and hand upon the husband of her choice, and freely intrusts her happiness to his keeping.

It was found upon investigation that the panel was worked by a system of concealed weights and levers, which were set in motion by anyone who stood upon the shelf in the library, and pulled steadily upon the frame of the picture. Both sides of the panel were fitted with a portrait of Grandma Belding, executed by the same artist. The arrangement had evidently been devised by the designer and builder of Belding Hall, who had perhaps used the underground chamber during the Civil Wars as an asylum for refugees from the Puritan soldiers; or, in which to hold meetings for plotting and planning against the enemy. In it were found a number of old flint-lock muskets, swords, and other arms, rusty and tarnished, together with uniforms of cavalier officers and soldiers.

Tenderly Grace Atherton's ashes were laid away in the family vault beside those of Maxwell Belding; and on a beautiful marble tablet appears an inscription, recording the fate of the unhappy bride.

Charles Malcolm.

PONSONBY: "Sir, I have come to request the honour of your daughter's hand in marriage." Stern Parent: "Impossible! Never will I give my consent." Ponsonby (anxiously): "Is your decision fixed—irrevocable?" Stern Parent (firmly): "It is." Ponsonby (much relieved): "Thanks, awfully. Nellie has been pestering me to ask you, and I did it just to oblige her."

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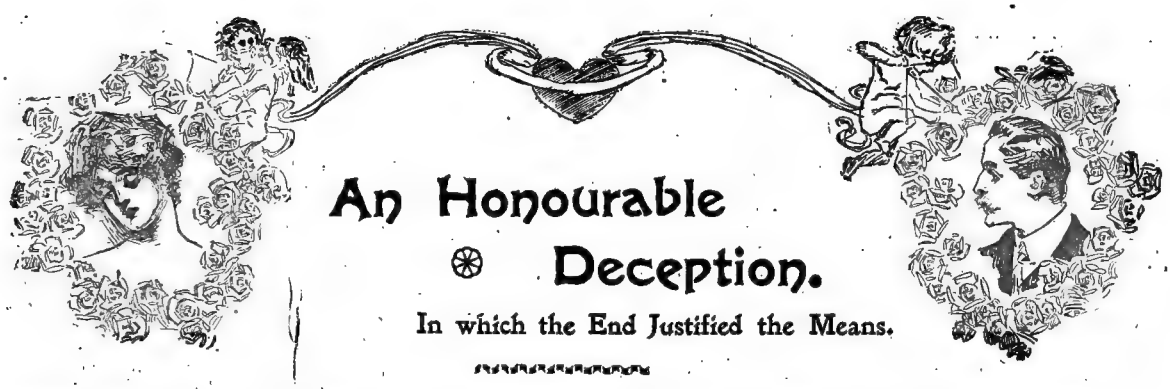

An Honourable Deception.

In which the End Justified the Means.

BERTIE LORRISTON sat before a blazing fire in a little spare sitting-room of his father's house which he and his brother Jack had for years used as a smoking-room and general place of retirement. He threw down the magazine he had been reading and tossed the stump of his cigar into the fire. An impatient sigh escaped his lips as he rose to his feet and looked towards the little gilt clock on the mantelpiece.

"I suppose I ought to go," he said in evident vexation. "I wish to goodness I hadn't made such a fool of myself! But it's done now, and, without a reasonable excuse for breaking it off, I can't see any way out of the difficulty. It's hard on Beryl, but I can't help it."

He paused for a moment to light a fresh cigar, and then added:

"If it had only been little Doris Cavill now!"

He glanced uneasily about the room as if fearing to be overheard. But he was alone, and could give his thoughts utterance.

"By all that's human," he went on savagely, "I can't—I won't do it! I know I ought never to have let Beryl's bewitching little face carry me off my feet. But it did, and now I'm in for it. Of course, the merest hint from me would suffice to break off the engagement, for Beryl has some spirit, but that would probably injure my chances with Doris. And I must shake off the one without losing my hold on the other. No, I must seek some other way."

He began to pace the room to and fro, turning over in his mind various plans which might lead to the attainment of this end. He was a handsome fellow, not more than seven-and-twenty, with clear skin and soft curly hair. But there was an air of irresolution about the handsome face that seemed to indicate a lack of ballast in his constitution. Gay, *debonair*, fascinating to a degree, it was small wonder that Bertie Lorriston was a particular favourite with the fair sex, or that he had captivated the heart of sweet Beryl Carrington.

His nature, too, was romantic, and, lacking that stability which might otherwise have saved him as well as others from later grief and humiliation, he allowed this unhappy predilection to lead him whithersoever it would.

And so it came to pass that, one night not three months before, he had "let himself drift," as he himself expressed it, and proposed to Beryl Carrington. How ardently he wished now that she had refused him! But the shy, sweet girl had long loved him in her secret heart, and she had run to him with a glad cry that could not be mistaken. It was but a passing infatuation, repented of almost before the morrow, and he would have given worlds to have undone the bonds which he himself had bound about his own neck. But his policy of "drift" was even here apparent, for he kept to the engagement, living in a temporary paradise that was, he well knew, anything but eternal.

And then he had met Doris Cavill, and, so far as he was capable of love in the truest sense of the word, he had given it to her without reserve. But he dared not tell her so, for she knew of his engagement to Beryl. And yet he felt sure that, were he free, Doris Cavill would favour his suit and smile upon his addresses.

He was not altogether bad—this Bertie Lorriston. He wanted to be straight, but he was weak and vacillating, and allowed the impulse of a moment to carry him away. And he loved Doris Cavill with all the ardour and passion that were characteristic of him, till that love made him callous of the pain and humiliation he gave to others.

A quick step sounded outside, and Jack Lorriston came into the room. He was two years younger than his brother Bert, but there was a striking likeness between them. Nor did the similarity end with their personal appearance, for, when Jack spoke, his voice would have caused a stranger to start, so great was the resemblance. Anyone could have told them apart who looked at them, but no one could have distinguished them by the pitch and intonation of their voices.

Jack was a shade less tall than his handsome brother, while his features were not so regular. But there was a frank, honest light in his clear blue eyes that marked him as a man to be trusted. He had always been called Jack, though that was his second name. His brother had been christened Herbert, and, from very infancy, he had been called Bertie. And when Mrs. Lorriston gave birth to a second son, he was christened Bertram John, after an uncle of his father's. But, as two Berties in one family would have led to much confusion, Mr. Lorriston had dubbed him Jack from the outset, and Jack had stuck to him ever since. He was not such a ladies' man as his brother Bertie, for he had strong views on the subject of "making a fool of a woman," stimulated, perhaps, by his brother's weakness in that direction. And he knew—ah, how bitterly!—the power and passion of a vigorous love.

To-night he was unusually agitated. Excitement—though partially suppressed—characterised his step and manner. Bertie looked up in some surprise as he entered. But Jack offered no explanation. Throwing a letter upon the table before his brother, he sat down in a chair facing Bertie and scanned his face as he opened and read the missive. Slowly the elder man read it through to the end, and then glanced across at his brother.

"Are you acquainted with the—er—contents of this note?" he asked in a strangely quiet voice. "I mean—do you know what it conveys?"

"Yes," said Jack shortly. "I met Miss Jocelyn this evening, and she told me the news."

There was a silence for a full minute, during which Jack scanned the face of his brother with growing resentment.

"What are you going to do?" he asked at last, and his tone was almost peremptory.

Bertie raised his eyebrows and looked across at his brother.

"Really," he said, "there is only one thing a fellow can do."

But he did not explain, and Jack waited in vain for him to proceed. There was plenty to read in Bertie's handsome face. Sympathy, sorrow, relief, hope, shame, triumph—all had their place for a brief moment on that dark countenance, and Jack, looking on, felt his resentment grow to anger.

"Well," he said at last, "and what may that be?"

Bertie looked at him in affected surprise

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"My dear fellow," he said, "you would not have me marry a—a blind woman! The position has become impossible, and, much as I regret and deplore the sad news this letter has conveyed to me, there is but one course open to me. I must put aside all further thought of making Miss Beryl Carrington my wife."

With a fierce cry of uncontrollable anger, Jack Lorriston sprang to his feet. Indignation was ablaze in his honest blue eyes and he flashed a look of ineffable contempt at his astonished brother.

"You—you cad!" he said in a fierce subdued whisper. "Are you dead to all nobility of feeling and impulse? Is your vaunted love so fleeting that it vanishes at the touch of sorrow? Love—true love—should leap into greater and more vigorous life when its object lies writhing under so terrible a blow as this! But yours—puny, selfish, empty—the love of a self-accused hypocrite—shrivels into rottenness at the first breath of dark affliction and lies stark and cold in the whited sepulchre to which you callously consign it!

"Why did you ever meddle with her heart? If you hold love so lightly, why exercise your power till you fill a woman's true heart with lifelong bitterness? And she has written to you—written out of the great, deep love she feels for you—for I know but too well of what this noble girl is capable—and now she waits for your coming—with her poor blind eyes turned beseechingly, wistfully, trustingly, towards the door by which you will never enter. And I—I have to call you brother!"

Bertie Lorriston's eyebrows were lifted even a little higher as he regarded his indignant brother. He did not appear in the least offended, though a flush of momentary shame, which he instantly smothered, had crossed his handsome face.

"My good fellow," he said, "you really ought to have been an actor. Really, you are simply splendid. Why, don't you go in for amateur theatricals? But, seriously, my dear boy, one would almost think you—er—were in love with the lady yourself."

A great wave of colour swept over Jack Lorriston's face and he trembled visibly as he heard the implied taunt.

"That is my affair," he said haughtily. And, without another word, he left the room, slamming the door behind him.

For two or three minutes Bertie gazed at the door by which he had gone out.

"Lucky I kept my temper," he said at last. "But, by Jove, I never suspected *that!* It's horrible for Beryl, but—but it means freedom for me—freedom and—Doris!"

He took up the letter once more and re-read it. It was a tearful little note, and any man's heart but Bertie Lorriston's would have been touched to the depths.

Beryl Carrington had buried her mother two months before—soon after her engagement to Bertie Lorriston—and the loss had left her almost broken-hearted. Grief plays terrible havoc with that marvellous and intricate piece of mechanism we call the body, and no consequence is perhaps half so awful as the sudden shattering of the delicate network of nerves that form the eye and the great impenetrable darkness that drops for ever upon the grief-stricken sufferer.

And this is what had befallen Beryl Carrington. Almost in an hour, the light had faded from her eyes and the pall of blindness had settled upon her young life. The letter intimated that she intended travelling to London, there to reside with an aunt, whom she knew would take care of her in her darkness.

And she wanted to see Bertie before she went.

"Can't do it," he said with a shrug of his shoulders. "I'm awfully sorry for the poor little thing, but the scene would be much too harrowing. I'd better write her a note."

He drew his chair to the table, and, taking a sheet of paper from a portfolio, wrote to the woman he had professed to love.

There were many expressions of sympathy and regret at the terrible affliction that had fallen upon her, but he said he could not, much as he desired to do so, call upon her that evening. And, as she left by the early morning train, he must give up all hope of seeing her before she went. He did not say it in so many words, but the letter was couched in terms which left an impression that the engagement would now have to be broken off.

This letter he dispatched to the sorrow-stricken girl, even leaving the reading of it to an outsider, since she would be unable to do so for herself, and thus adding to the humiliation it brought her.

The next day was Sunday, and among the congregation in the little country church were Bertie and Jack Lorriston. Jack marvelled how his brother could have come into that holy place. Poor little Beryl had gone away to London by the early morning train, and Jack's heart ached for her. Thank God he had spared her one bitter humiliation, but of this his brother did not as yet know. The service began, but Jack's thoughts were elsewhere, and, try as he might, he could not keep his attention from wandering. Suddenly, however, he grew interested. His head bent forward and a look of keen attention came into his face. It was during the reading of the first lesson, and the story was of Isaac, stricken in his old age with blindness, blessing his son Jacob instead of Esau his firstborn. "Thy voice is the voice of Jacob!" were the words that reached him, and Jack felt his breath come quick as a new and wonderful idea flashed into his mind. From that time forward he was wholly dead to the service in the little church. The theme of that first lesson whirled through his brain, and he began mechanically, though with inward excitement, to revolve the situation in his mind. The pronouncing of the benediction roused him from his meditations, and he went rapidly home.

As soon as he reached it, he went to the little private sitting-room and awaited his brother.

Five minutes later he came in and sat himself down in his favourite easy-chair.

Jack looked at him. Then he went to the door, closed it, and returned to his brother.

"Bertie," he said, with a note of constraint in his voice, "I am going to make a confession. But I want one from you first. After that, I shall make a suggestion. Tell me, honestly and straightforwardly, am I right in suspecting that you welcome this termination of your engagement because of your—er—love for another woman?" He could hardly use the term. It seemed like sacrilege to apply so holy a word to his callous-hearted brother. But it behoved him to bridle his tongue.

Bertie hesitated.

"Well," he said at last, "since you ask, my dear fellow, I am free to confess that you are right."

"Thanks," responded Jack, relieved to find that his suspicions had not been unfounded. "Now I will answer the question you put to me last night. I do love Beryl Carrington. I have loved her for more than a year, and was just on the eve of proposing to her when you stepped in between us and ruined my chances."

Bertie looked up quickly.

"Awfully sorry, old chap!" he said languidly. But there was a look of sympathy in his eyes which counteracted the tone.

Jack, however, appeared to notice neither. His face was pregnant with purpose, and Bertie looked at him, fascinated.

"Now for my suggestion," went on Jack rapidly. "Did the reading of the first lesson this morning appear to you in any way significant? Did you observe any parallel between that old-time story and the present position in which we—you and I, Bertie Lorriston—find ourselves placed?"

A look of bewilderment came into Bertie's handsome face.

"Don't see your drift," he said slowly. "Something about old Isaac blessing the wrong son, wasn't it?"

Jack nodded.

"Look here," he said, drawing nearer his brother, "I can see a way out of this difficulty which will make no earthly difference to you, and will give me what I have so long desired. Indeed, it may even help you, too."

Bertie shook his head.

"Still in the dark," he said. "For Heaven's sake, old fellow, be more explicit!"

Jack drew his seat to the table and faced his brother.

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"I will," he said. "Now listen to my suggestion. You want nothing further to do with Beryl Carrington. I do. Suppose, then, I travel up to London, see her, and call myself, not Jack, but Bertie Lorriston. No one can tell us apart by the sound of our voices—not even she. And—and she cannot see our faces. The aunt to whom she has gone has never set eyes on either of us, and I feel sure Beryl will not discover the—the deception. And you—you will be free to follow your own inclinations."

For some minutes there was silence in the little room.

Bertie Lorriston's face was a study to look upon. He chafed at the thought of his brother making love to the woman whose kisses had been wholly his—and in his name too. But the possibility of greater freedom was not without its attraction. Besides, the plan would relieve his conscience. His conscience didn't matter very much, but it was just as well to humour it when he lost nothing by doing so. But he foresaw one or two obstacles to the plan, and communicated them to his brother.

"What about the wedding-day?" he asked drily.

Jack smiled.

"You forget," he replied quickly. "Miss Carrington knows you, as does everyone else, by the name of Bertie Lorriston, and she knows me as Jack. I should, however, be married in my rightful name of Bertram, and she would naturally identify Bertram with the Bertie she had always known."

Bertie smiled.

"By Jove!" he said, "you're right, old fellow! I never thought of that. Fate seems to be helping you at last."

Jack's face flushed, but he made no reply.

"But do you think you could deceive Beryl?" Bertie went on. He did not relish the thought that he could be so easily superseded.

"I think so," Jack answered coldly. "The regard I have for her would help me more than you think."

Again Bertie was silent. Presently he said:

"There's one other obstacle which I must let you know. Last night I wrote her a letter. I did not say so outright, but I hinted that the engagement would now have to be broken off. I'm afraid your reception won't be a pleasant one."

Jack smiled, and, drawing a still unopened letter from his pocket, tossed it on the table.

"Fortunately," he said, "my indignation of last night made me so far considerate of Miss Carrington's feelings that I intercepted that letter. I guessed well enough what it contained, and would have torn it into fragments had I not realised in time that my brother might have suspected me of reading its contents before doing so. So I kept it intact, and it is fortunate I did so."

Bertie's list of objections was now exhausted, and, truth to tell, he was not wholly free from a feeling of relief that Jack had swept them away so effectually.

"All right," he said. "But you must keep her in London, or the truth will leak out."

Jack nodded.

"I'll see to that," he said quietly. And, with a stiff little nod to his brother, he left the room.

The afternoon train conveyed him to London, and a little after six o'clock he was ushered into the room where Beryl Carrington was sitting, her unseeing eyes turned towards him as he entered. Beryl's aunt, with a feeling of delicacy, closed the door softly on the two, and went, with a glad light in her kind, motherly eyes, to picture in the solitary state of the empty drawing-room the meeting between the two lovers.

Jack went swiftly forward and knelt down by Beryl's side.

"Darling," he said, while his voice shook with strong emotion, "I am sorry I could not come to you yesterday. But I have come now, dear."

He took her little hands in his and kissed them. There was no suspicion in the face that turned towards him. With a glad cry she put her arms about his neck and began to cry softly to herself, the tears falling upon Jack's crisp curls.

"Don't," he pleaded, drawing the tear-stained face down to his and kissing it tenderly. "You must not cry any more, darling. I am here to protect you, to care for you, and, if you will let me, to make a home for you."

A little glad sob rose in Beryl's throat.

"Oh," she said, "I can't let you, Bertie. You will not want a blind wife like me. You will grow tired of me. It is very noble of you to offer, dear, but I know it is only sympathy and pity which prompt you to do so. I must let you go, darling—I must, I must—and yet, I love you so—so dearly!"

She clung to him, and he soothed her again.

"Beryl," he said, and his words carried conviction to the girl beside him, "it is true I feel for you a sympathy I cannot express. But that is the least of all my present emotions. I love you, my sweet, with all the strength of a man's true heart. And life apart from you will not be life to me. I must have you, or my happiness will end from this day forth. And that which has befallen you only knits us together more closely in the bond of love."

Beryl clung to him as he spoke, and there were tears of joy shining in the sightless eyes that touched him to the heart.

So the days went by, and, at the end of two months, Beryl Carrington yielded to the pleadings of her lover and was quietly married to him in London.

She had loved Bertie Lorriston with all the idolatry of a romantic girl. Little things had jarred upon her sensitiveness, but love had excused them all. But since that great darkness had fallen upon her, he seemed to have changed. Before, he had been inclined to selfishness. Now his thoughts were only of her. It was the same dear, loved voice, but of late it had comforted her far more than ever it had done in the old days.

Then it had been she whose love seemed the greatest, the noblest, the truest. But now that love was met by another, as strong and deep and tender as her own, and she was learning to lean on this strong, self-reliant husband with a trustfulness that was touching to see. Strong? Yes, he was so strong. And yet he was as gentle as a child in his tender devotion to her, and the love in her heart grew day by day till its intensity swallowed up every other thought. And so the days grew into weeks and the weeks into months, till a year had gone over their heads since that well-remembered day when they had stood together by the altar-rails and voiced their vows to God. And then an unforeseen event occurred which for a time filled Jack's stout heart with dark foreboding.

Beryl had been persuaded by her aunt to seek fresh advice for her eyes, and Jack, not daring to raise any objection to the plan, had accompanied her to a rising specialist. A long and tedious examination resulted in the startling affirmation that there was reason to believe a cure might be effected. Beryl's heart bounded as she heard the glad news, but that of Jack sank with dread misgiving. But he said nothing, leaving it to Destiny to shape his fate as it listed. A month of dreary lying on her bed, with her eyes tightly bandaged and the room darkened, and one day the bandage was removed and Beryl could see.

When all was quiet, Jack stole into the room and knelt by his wife's bedside. She looked into his face long and earnestly, and Jack trembled as he waited, daring not to speak. For a long time there was no sound, while Jack's heart beat fast with suppressed excitement. And then the soft white arms of his dear wife stole round his neck and she whispered his name—the old name—in his ear:

"Jack—my husband—my—my love!"

The truth had come home to her in a flash as she looked into his face.

W. J. Mowbray.

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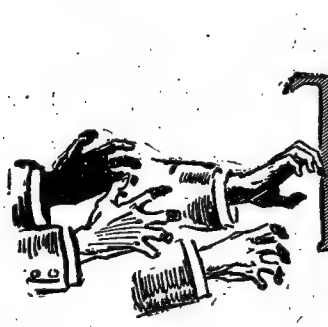
Fascinating Series.



THE PURSUIT OF SARA

The names of persons mentioned in this series are not necessarily the correct ones.

TO REFRESH YOUR MEMORY.

These are the principal characters in this series:

Sara Gillespie, the relater of these experiences. She takes some papers (which really belong to her lover, Sir Noel Masterman, and are of immense value) from her employers, Templeton and Co., and flees to Bedford. The firm follow her up, and using every means in their power to make Sara restore the papers, drive her to Northampton, Leicester, and Birmingham. She, however, successfully manages to elude capture.

Templeton and Co.—This is the firm of scoundrels who wish to do Noel Masterman so much harm. The partners are Templeton, Harrington Shackell, and Rigby Starr, all of them steeped in villainy.

Noel Masterman, who succeeded to the Baronetcy on the death of his cousin Herbert, who was foully murdered by Harrington Shackell. Sara heard the latter tell Templeton how he accomplished this act, but has no witnesses to prove it. Noel is in love with Sara, but is away on the Continent when she regains the fateful papers from Templeton and Co.; hence Sara has no one to help her.

Sidney Ilford.—An agent of the firm who tries to ensnare Sara.

Maggie Dunkley.—A young girl whose brother Sara rescues from death at Northampton. Sara confides in her, and is rendered great assistance.

Truscot Moran—Into whose hands Sara falls in Birmingham. He is an unscrupulous money-maker. In his house lives his niece, Lesbia, whom he is starving to death, so as to benefit by her insurance money. He forces Sara to pose as Lesbia in order to get the insurance policy signed, on the threat of exposing her to Templeton.

Arthur Merridew.—The lover of Lesbia, who conspires with Sara to help Lesbia to escape. This is successfully accomplished.

THE ACCIDENT AT NUNEATON.

PARALYSED with terror, I stood, waiting for the inevitable crash of the approaching car; even as I felt the breath of the engine hot in my face, even as the grinding jar of the wheels sent shock after shock along my nerves, I was seized tightly by the waist, thrown violently aside, and staggering, found myself, unhurt, once more upon the side of safety.

"A very near thing, Miss Gillespie," said a weak, quavering voice. "Another second and you would have been underneath the tram."

For a moment I did not realise what my preserver said, I did not even realise who he was, clinging to him instinctively as the one steady thing in a world that reeled about me in a mad whirl. An indistinct murmur of voices gradually swelling in volume to a roar, a sensation of icy coldness at my heart, and then—the mist cleared from my eyes, the earth was solid to my feet. I stood on the pavement in Corporation Street—Arthur Merridew at my side!

Even now the thought of my contemptuous regard for the youth brings an unpleasant twinge; I had looked on him as a weakling, a sentimental fool, with no capacity for daring, no courage, no foresight. I had patronised him and despised him, and now it was to him I owed my life. Something of what I felt, I tried to stammer out; Merridew cut me short.

"Don't say anything more, please," he said. "There isn't time for talk, much less thanks. We must get out of this as soon as possible. I doubt even now if we shall avoid that man"—he pointed to Templeton. "Ah!" as the senior partner hove in sight, "I was afraid of it. Look here, Miss Gillespie, you must let me take command of this affair, you must really; you don't know the man and have never heard of him, stick to that; I'll back you up and we shall pull through. Now then"—Merridew turned pugnaciously upon the head of the firm, "what do you mean by pushing against this lady? She's been nearly killed once already to-night. That's quite enough excitement for one evening, without your throwing her into the road."

The crowd, who had witnessed Merridew's brave act, cheered the speech with enthusiasm.

"Don't you dare to talk to me," went on my champion, "who are you to push women and children off the pavement! Call a policeman, will you? It will save me trouble if you do. I can give you into custody for obstructing the roadway."

For answer, Templeton firmly grasped my arm, and to the full extent of his powerful voice shouted "Police!" in a strident and determined fashion.

"Let go," cried Merridew, striking at the senior partner wildly. "Let go, I say," then, as Templeton, paying no attention to his lunges, still called for aid, still grasped me tightly, Merridew veered to another tack. "Help!" he screamed, "help! He's killing the girl. Murder! Help!"

The crowd, ready—as crowds ever are—to respond to a call of the kind, closed round us, and, pressing against Templeton, forced him, by the sheer weight of numbers, to release me. Waving his stick, Templeton still kept up his cry for the police, and to my consternation, I perceived the shining helmet of a man in blue, bearing down upon us.

By the time he arrived on the scene, however, Arthur and I had made good our escape. We dodged through the people, and, skirting the crowd, edged off up the left hand side of Old Square, and so into the maze of side turnings and narrow streets that lie at the back.

Once out of sight and sound of Templeton, we hailed a cab, and drove to Mrs. Merridew's, a small house in a turning off Moseley Road. Arthur informed me on the way that he and Lesbia had been so concerned for my safety, that he had started to go to the office in Colemore Row to find out if he

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could what had happened. He had, by great good fortune, crossed the Square in time to snatch me out of the way of the tram, and to prove that, sentiment notwithstanding, he was a man of courage and resource.

Lesbia was very pleased to see me and her gratitude for what I had done for her quite touched me. She looked very terrible, poor girl, and the doctor, whom Arthur had summoned to attend her, gave no great hopes of her recovery. He stated that she was suffering from blood-poisoning, that how she had contracted the complaint it was not easy to say. He listened to her account of Moran's treatment with evident incredulity, regarding her complaints as the fretful fancies of an invalid.

Lesbia, however, had guarded against such disbelief in a masterly fashion. She produced a parcel of food, some bread and meat, and a portion of rice pudding. The doctor tasted the latter, looked suddenly grave, and suggested that he should subject the remainder to an analysis.

Lesbia consented, and saw the departure of the medico and the pudding with feelings of elation.

"He will be found guilty," she cried, "and if I die, he will be hanged."

"You shall not die, my dearest," cried her lover, "you will get well and strong for my sake. Lesbia, you shall not die." He clasped her in his arms and kissed her tenderly.

Meantime Mrs. Merridew, with great good sense, prepared a meal, to which Arthur and I sat down together. It was late, past ten o'clock, and I was once more racking my brain as to how I should discover Noel's whereabouts, when there came a loud ring at the bell.

"That's Moran," said Arthur. "He's come for Lesbia."

"You won't give her up?" I cried excitedly.

"No," he said slowly, "I shall never give her up"—and he advanced to admit the enemy.

Startled out of his usual calm, impassive self, Truscot faced us, indignation struggling with fear.

"You have abducted my niece," he cried, "you, and that red-haired minx. You may not know that it is an offence punishable by law, and that the term of imprisonment for such an offence is a long one. In consideration of the fact that you are both young, however, and acted possibly more from folly than wickedness, I am prepared to forego prosecution—on one condition—that you take me to my niece, offer no opposition to my removing her from here at once, refuse——" he paused dramatically—"and I shall apply for a warrant for your arrest."

"I fancy you'll find yourself a bit late, Mr. Moran," said Arthur, "long before I'm in custody, you'll find yourself on trial for the attempted murder—please God it will stop at attempted—of Lesbia, your niece. Oh, don't think you can bluff me," as Truscot sprang towards him, virtuous indignation shining in his eyes, "you can protest from now until to-morrow morning, it won't make a bit of difference; facts are facts, and not all the protestations in the world can explain the poison out of a rice pudding. We've got it here," he motioned to the cupboard, "or rather we had it. 'Tis under the care of the doctor now, the man who analysed it."

"Rubbish," snarled Truscot, snapping his fingers. "The mere idle ravings of an hysterical girl are not *proofs!* and if my cook uses some new-fangled essence in a pudding am I to be held responsible? You talk nonsense, impudent, libellous nonsense certainly, but as for anyone paying attention to such a farrago of absurdities—the notion is absurd!"

"Besides the pudding, there was bread and meat," said Arthur calmly. "I don't think the Insurance Company will regard the analysis as nonsense. However," he smiled at me, "I shall be in a better position to give you their opinion to-morrow, when Miss Gillespie has made her statement!"

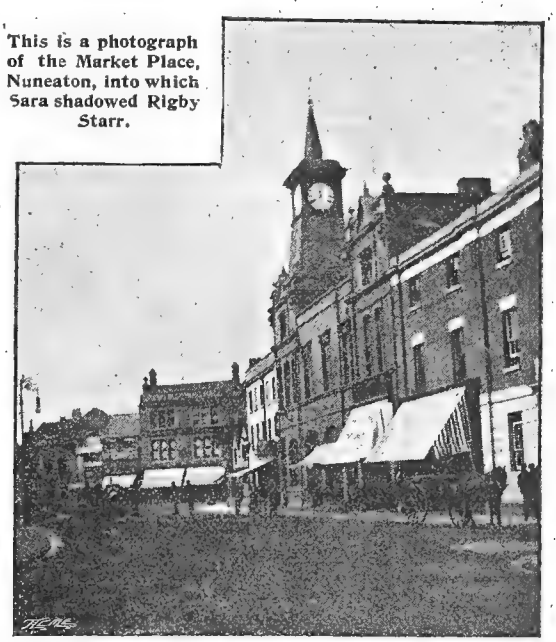
"If you confess to the fraud," he turned to me, "you implicate yourself. I don't fancy your philanthropy will carry you as far as going to prison, eh, Miss Gillespie; I shall be punished for my share in the conspiracy certainly, but don't suppose you'll get off scot free."

"I am prepared to run the risk," I answered doggedly. "To-morrow I shall go with Mr. Merridew to the insurance office and tell them the history of the whole affair. My statement, supported by Lesbia's story and the analysis of her food, will be strong enough to place you in a very awkward fix, I hope you will be sent to prison; at any rate, you will be disgraced."

"And you," he turned to me abruptly, "what will you gain by this? Come, Miss Gillespie, you're too sharp a business woman not to take advantage of your opportunities. Suppose you go to the insurance people, it would profit you nothing and inconvenience me a little—though by no means to the extent you suppose. Can't we come to an arrangement? If you withhold certain information, I might feel inclined to part with some. For instance——"

"Tell me where Noel is, and I'll keep silence," I cried impetuously. "I want to punish you—yes; but I want my lover more. Where is he?"

"One moment," interrupted Arthur; "how will you prove the accuracy of Mr. Moran's information? You may give



This is a photograph of the Market Place, Nuneaton, into which Sara shadowed Rigby Starr.

your promise, lose your opportunity, and then discover you have been fooled; possibly find yourself in the hands of your enemies."

"Let him tell me where Noel is," I answered, "and I will start off for the place at once. If what he says is true—if I find my sweetheart—well and good; he is safe, so far as I am concerned. If not, I shall return to Birmingham and call at the insurance offices to-morrow morning."

"You need not be afraid," said Truscot; "here," he took out a sheet of notepaper, "is the address, written in Templeton's own writing. You will see that it is a letter of instructions from the head of the firm to Rigby Starr, and it refers to Noel Masterman."

He held the letter near enough for me to recognise the writing, and to identify the paper as belonging to the firm.

"Give it to me," I urged. "I'll promise anything; give it to me," and with trembling hands I tried to snatch it from him.

"One minute, if you please. There are other matters to be considered first. It is not sufficient for you alone to promise; I must have an undertaking from my niece and Mr. Merridew that they will refrain from statements likely to damage my reputation; or, better still, a letter signed by them, stating their belief in my affection and good feeling."

"That," said Arthur steadily, "you shall never have. I

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am prepared, for Miss Gillespie's sake, to refrain from any action against you for the present, and Lesbia, at my request, will do the same. But," the young man's face grew stern, "farther than that I will not go. Sooner or later you will have to answer for your crime."

I looked at him with all the pleading my face could express. He glanced back at me, sympathy, kindness even in his eyes, but of yielding not a jot. The weak-minded, dreamy young man I had known had disappeared; the Arthur Merridew who stood before me was of very different stuff.

"Lesbia must come before all things," he said gravely. "If it was myself that was concerned, I would do as you ask. But for her sake I must refuse."

"Well," said Moran calmly, "what do you mean by the present?"

"A week, no longer, Mr. Moran. At the end of that time I shall follow up the proceedings against you to-day. For a week, however, I will do nothing, providing the information you give Miss Gillespie proves correct."

"Providing also," I interrupted, "that I do not fall into Templeton's hands. You will have to keep the senior partner under watch, and—Mr. Moran. If I am taken the contract falls to the ground."

"Very well," he said lightly, a strange smile twitching at his lips, "I accept your terms; a week's time from now if my information proves correct. Here is the letter," he threw the document towards me, "now give me your word to keep silence for a week."

There was something sinister in the fashion in which he spoke the words. I had it in my heart to warn Merridew not to accept—to let me fight my battle single-handed, and help himself and Lesbia out of the compact. I knew instinctively that mischief would ensue, mischief to Lesbia and her lover—her poor young lover, whose brave heart was their only weapon of defence. And yet how could I warn him, when the price of such warning was the knowledge of my lover's whereabouts? Sorry I was for them both; but for love's sake, for Noel's sake, I was ready to sacrifice them and the whole world too.

Tuttle Hill Quarry, where Sara experienced such a thrilling adventure. It was near here that the house in which Sara expected to find Noel was situated.

Arthur gave his promise, and a few minutes later Moran left the house, a light-hearted message to Lesbia on his lips.

"I'll throw the senior partner off the scent, my dear," he said to me familiarly. "You're safe for a week. By-the-bye," he patted me on the shoulder, "here's your salary; I've paid you for a week. You've done more in three days than most clerks in six." I took the money, and said nothing. Truly Truscot Moran was a remarkable man.

He smiled in his usual charming fashion, and his serenity fully restored, departed.

No sooner had the front door closed behind him than I hastily seized on Templeton's letter. It was an artfully-worded document; couched in business phraseology, the instructions apparently referred to consignments of goods awaiting Starr's attention. The particular consignment that aroused my interest was expected at Nuneaton. A Mr. Masterman, wrote the senior partner, would arrive at that town by the down train due at ten minutes past twelve midnight, on Friday of that week. Eagerly I turned the letter over and observed the date. It had been written on the previous Monday, it was therefore to-night—*to-night* that Noel was coming to Nuneaton.

"A time-table, quick!" I called to Arthur. "I must start immediately."

A quick scrutiny revealed the fact that there was a train leaving Birmingham at eleven thirty-five, which would reach Nuneaton at twelve three, just seven minutes before Noel. It wanted but a few minutes to eleven; there was no time to lose. Leaving Arthur to pack up some sandwiches for my refreshment, I rushed upstairs to say good-bye to Lesbia.

She clung to me despairingly, and begged me not to leave her longer than a day without a letter.

"Let me know where you are," she pleaded; "promise to let me know."

I said a few words of comfort to her, telling her not to worry, and bade her farewell.

Arthur was ready to take me to the station when I came down, Mrs. Merridew embraced me in a motherly fashion, and hoped that I should soon return. The poor lady did not in the least understand why all these things were happening in her house, nor, to do her justice, did she try to find out. Blessed is the woman who does not ask for tiresome explanations.

The train was some two or three minutes late, and anxiety lest I should miss Noel possessed me as I entered the carriage. It seemed a long journey. Imagination outstripping the engine, pictured my lover at the station, pictured myself just too late! I craned my head through the window, studying eagerly the country side. In the darkness the hedges took strange shapes; the distant hills, wooded with thickly-growing trees, frowned darkly at me; the signal posts along the line pointed a spectral finger, a warning it seemed to me, of coming ill.

We reached the sleepy station of Nuneaton some few minutes late. I had barely time to cross the line to take up a position on the platform, where I could scan the passengers without being seen, when the twelve-ten steamed in.

Three men alighted—Shackell, Rigby Starr, and a tall, heavily-bearded man, a stranger to me. No one else got out of the train. Noel, apparently, had not arrived! I moved into the doorway of the waiting-room, well out of their line of vision, and thought out the situation. There was a hitch somewhere; Rigby Starr had been instructed to meet the twelve ten—there was no suggestion that he would be travelling in the train. I drew out Templeton's letter, and gazed hard at the date; to all appearances it had not been tampered with. Moran had not, as I was at first inclined to think, palmed off a forgery upon me. The senior partner had evidently changed his plans, and wired a fresh set of instructions.

Meanwhile where was Noel? The disappointment brought the tears to my eyes, and made me clench my hands, raging against my impotence. There was but one thing to be done—

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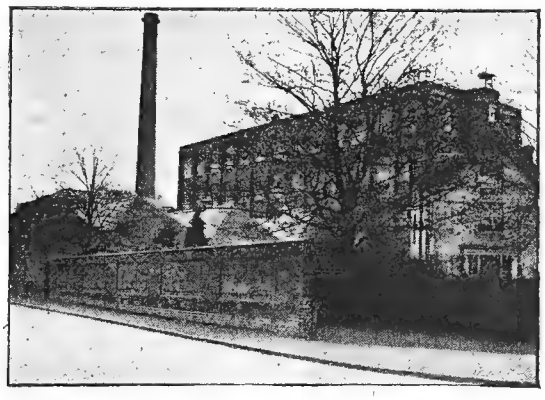


A silk factory in Nuneaton. It was at the gate of one of these factories that Sara encountered Sidney Ilford, and in consequence experienced—

I must follow the three men, Shackell, Rigby, and the stranger, and discover their destination.

My purpose was foiled, however; the two partners, arm in arm with the stranger, a dull-eyed man, whose heavy beard obscured his face, walked together from the station. Immediately outside Shackell hailed a shabby-looking carriage, in which the bearded man took his seat. Shackell stepped in after him, but Rigby Starr remained at the road side. For a moment I hesitated. Should I charter another conveyance and follow Shackell, or remain and keep Rigby well in sight? I decided on the latter course, and watched the carriage out of sight, waiting till Rigby chose to move.

It was a damp, unpleasant evening, the air was misty, the roads muddy, but undeterred, Rigby stepped out at a swinging pace, while I, at a discreet distance, followed, my heart quaking for fear I should be heard up Abbey Street—surely the longest street ever built—through a narrow turning into the Market Place, and then into the Bull Inn. Starr had evidently engaged a room, for his summons at the door was speedily attended to, and he was ushered through the portals with a hearty greeting.

A few minutes afterwards the door opened again, and a man, evidently employed in the establishment, passed into the street.

I crossed the road and met him at the corner.

"Can you tell me of a hotel?" I asked. "I've missed my train at the station, and find I shall have to stay here all night."

He stopped and looked at me with curiosity.

"The Bull is for commercials," he said slowly, "we don't take ladies there, you'll have to go to the Temperance place, they'll let you have a room. It stands at the top of Abbey Street, round the corner there, you can't miss it."

"Thank you," said I, and then, "I saw that gentleman go in to the Bull just now, is he stopping there?"

"For the night," he answered. Then, "Do you know him?"

"I think so, but I'm not quite sure. I only just caught a glimpse of his face. I should know if he is the man I think directly I saw him in the daylight."

"It's awkward like to speak to a stranger," said the lad.

"Very," I returned with feeling, "and yet if he is the gentleman I mean, he will be very disappointed not to meet me."

"I can take a message," was the answer.

"Oh, I sha'n't trouble so much as that. You might find out when he's leaving Nuneaton, and by what train; if you like to let me know, I'll pay you for your trouble."

By this time we had reached the Temperance Hotel; pealing the bell I waited for admittance. At last a footstep sounded in the hall. I turned to the lad from the Bull and slipped a shilling in his hand.

"Call here for me to-morrow about ten, and I'll give you as much again."

He pocketed the money gleefully, assured me he would find out what I wished to know, and went on his way rejoicing.

I stopped the night at the hotel, and, worn out with fatigue, slept soundly. Punctually at ten, my companion of the previous evening put in an appearance.

Rigby Starr, he said, was stopping at Nuneaton for a day or two. He had given orders for a trap at three that afternoon, and my friend, it seemed, was to drive him.

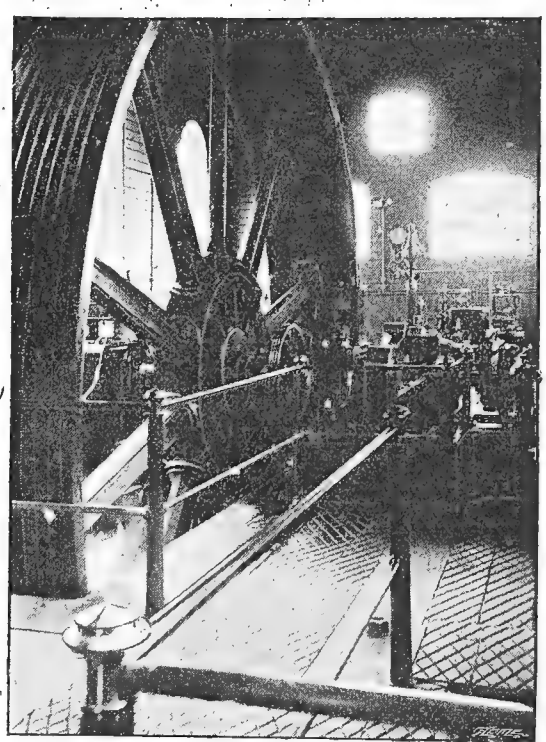
"We're going up Tuttle Hill," he said, "past the quarries. We shall be out the best part of three hours."

I rewarded my informant, and set out to study the geography of Tuttle Hill.

A long, straggling place, built without plan or sequence, Nuneaton is a depressing spot. It boasts no parks or open spaces, the small inclosure commonly called the Recreation Grounds being a sandy waste, in which islets of grass and hungry-looking shrubs form the "Grounds," and a few swings and see-saws the "Recreation." All day long its inhabitants toil in the neighbouring quarries, coal mines, and factories, returning after their day's labour to a tiny house in a cheerless street, empty of life, devoid of colour. All the dreary monotony of town existence, with none of its stir, all the sleepiness of village life, without its peaceful setting. An hour's walk from the green country, Nuneaton reminds me of those desolate suburbs that spring up almost in a night upon the fringe of London.

Slowly and by degrees, having regard to the yet weak condition of my ankle, I made my way through the town to Tuttle Hill, a long ascent at the extreme outskirts of Nuneaton.

Some distance up the hill I was attracted by a notice, setting forth that anyone who trespassed on the quarry and the grounds adjoining, would be prosecuted—fatigue and the inclination for forbidden things, inherent in human



—the perilous adventure by the great wheel. Our photograph shows a specimen of one of these huge machines, and the great danger that Sara was in can easily be imagined.

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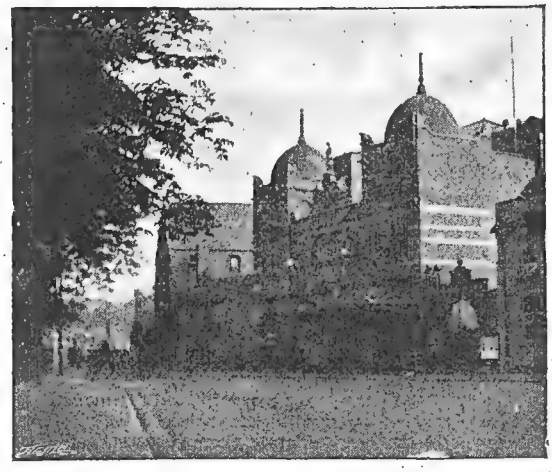


Nuneaton Theatre. It was outside this pretty place of amusement that Sara first had her attention drawn to the detective who was following her.

nature, induced me to scramble over the fence and make my way to the quarry's brink. A lonely, deserted spot, with not a workman in sight, it gave one a strange impression of desolation. Scarred by the many hands that had hewn huge blocks of granite from its side, the quarry yawned like an open grave beneath one's feet.

I stooped to look over the brink; then with a shudder drew back, dizzy at sight of the depths below.

Resting against a boulder at a safe distance from the edge, I fixed my eyes upon the road.

Some half hour later I heard the sound of a horse's hoofs galloping up the hill. It was no cart that hastened towards me, the pace was all too quick. I started to my feet and drew near to the fence that marked off the inclosure from the road—ready, if needs be, to conceal myself behind a clump of elder bushes. A trap stopped suddenly, the driver, my friend, the shabby lad, hailed me in cheery tones:

"Mr. Starr's got down yonder," he pointed over his shoulder. "He's taken a short cut to the house over there," and he motioned again to the other side of the quarry, where, on the brow of the hill, a square stone building was visible.

"You won't overtake him on the road, miss," said the boy. "If you want to catch him you'd best take the path by the quarry; you'll get there as quick as he will that way."

I nodded my thanks, and having ascertained that the lad was not to await Rigby's return retraced my steps. The path he spoke of skirted the edge of the great pit; on the one side yawned the quarry; on the other, steep banks perpendicular as a wall hedged it in. A false step might send me hurling into the gulf.

And yet it was essential I should reach the house upon the hill before Rigby arrived. In that bleak place, strong as a prison, silent and remote, something told me I should find Noel. I would clamour at the door, beat at the window till they let me in—into my lover, and he and I would surely find our way to liberty. If not, if at the worst, they kept us prisoners, it could not be for ever, and—we should be together!

I set my eyes upon the square house upon the hill, far, far above those shuddering depths; slowly, painfully, and with infinite care, I picked my way along the track.

Half the distance was traversed, when down the hill side, from the direction of the house, a man, running quickly, came into view. He glanced back, every now and then, over his shoulder, as if fearing pursuit. As he came nearer I recognised in him the dark-bearded stranger I had seen the previous night at the station.

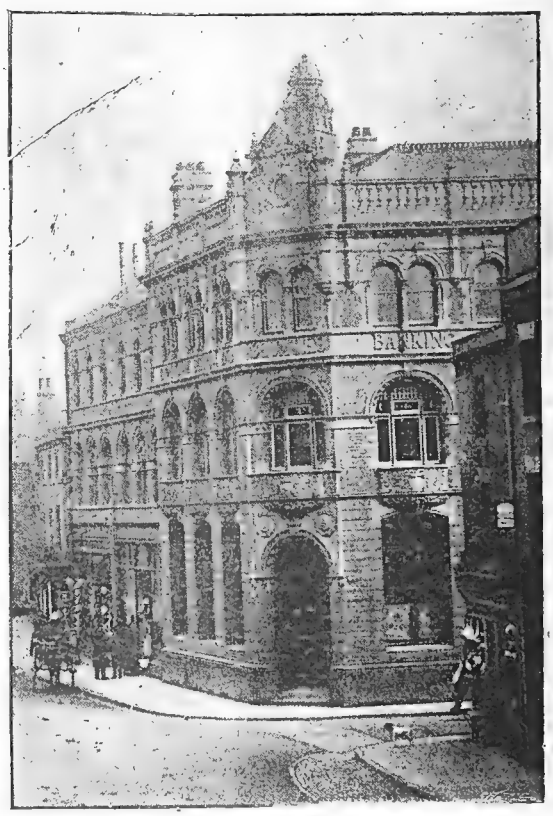
He appeared to be making for the quarry, and to my astonishment and fear—the descent was terribly precipitous—proceeded to clamber over the edge, hanging on to roots of shrubs and jutting stones, clinging ant-like to the face of the cliff.

Just as he touched the bottom, I caught sight of a figure moving amongst the boulders that strewed the ground, trying it seemed to hide from the new-comer.

The bearded man evidently shared my opinion, for, with a cry of rage, he rushed towards the other, bearing him to the ground.

In a second my mind leapt to a colourable explanation of what was taking place. Noel, by some happy chance, had escaped from the house on the hill, and was making his way through the quarry as a short cut to the road. The bearded man had discovered his absence and had given chase. In a short time Shackell would find it out also, and joined by Starr, would come to the rescue. At that very moment Shackell's big figure hurried down the hill. The two combatants were rolling over and over on the ground, Noel, or the man I thought was Noel, showed plenty of fight, and though smaller than the other, seemed able to give his adversary plenty of trouble. At last the bearded man clenched the situation by a savage blow that knocked the man flat upon his back. For a moment I was tempted to rush down the incline to his assistance; the next a more effective means of disabling his adversary suggested itself. I began to throw down pieces of stone hoping to distract the bearded man's attention. He glanced up as the pieces fell at his feet, and strained to see from where they came.

Encouraged by my success I launched a fusillade of stones, that had the effect of driving the bearded man still farther



The imposing-looking bank at Nuneaton to which Sara intended to go to endeavour to change two of the notes for gold, in order to pay Sidney Ilford.

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back from the prostrate figure of his enemy. One of these stones, larger than the rest, in its path down the quarry side, cannoned against a small granite boulder, which, thus set free, loosed in its rush a yet larger piece of rock. This last, with great velocity, rolled like a cannon-ball, jumping from ridge to ridge, from ledge to ledge, until it reached the bottom with an immense thud.

Immediately upon the thud, rose a piercing scream.

Someone was hurt, someone—I looked over the edge, a sickening fear at my heart. I had not meant to hurt the bearded man, and then I realised that it was the figure on the ground the stone had struck, the figure I had thought was Noel.

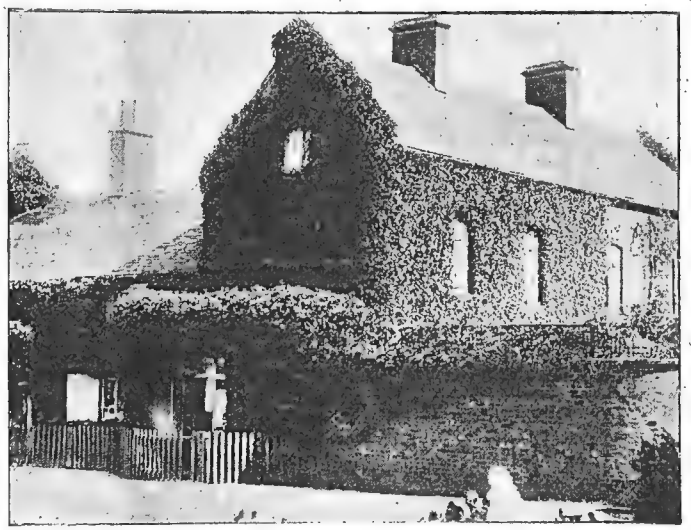
Again the shriek of agony came up to me, and then—silence. And in the warm sunshine I felt my heart turn chill, the blue of the sky turned to a sullen grey, the earth grew dark before me—I felt the bitterness of death!

I could not move, my limbs seemed turned to stone. I could not cry or call, but sat cold and motionless against the granite wall.

I did not faint, nor for a moment lose consciousness, but all apprehension of what was happening seemed to have left me.

I gazed at the scene below, and saw without understanding what took place.

Shackell, who by this time had reached the bottom of the quarry, advanced to the bearded man, who seemed inclined to extend hostilities in his direction. After some difficulty Shackell succeeded in convincing him of his friendly intentions, and induced him to take a longer but much safer path that led up the other side of the quarry. Neither of them so much as looked at that still white face upon the ground, neither put out a hand to help him. As the two disappeared from view, the possibility that after all the blow had not been fatal, after all my lover was stunned, not dead, came to me with a flash of hope. It seemed to bring fresh life to me, to put new strength into my limbs.



Griff House, the residence of the late George Eliot, where it was arranged that Sidney Ilford and Sara should meet.

I managed to make my way round the quarry's brink till I reached the path, by means of which Shackell and the other had ascended.

Soon, very soon, I reached the bottom of the quarry, and drew near to where he lay—the stone upon his breast.

With a great cry I knelt upon the ground, and lifting the stone away, I took his head upon my knees. Then, for my eyes were dim, bending down closer, I gazed into the face of *Rigby Starr!*

Not Noel! Not my beloved, but his enemy and mine lay in the dust. For the moment fierce joy of the discovery kept fear at bay—the fear that I had killed him. The next, fear had its way. I was a murderer; he was dead.

His heart, surely it had not ceased to beat? I grasped his wrist and felt for his pulse. I pressed my ear to his heart, and counted the faint, sobbing breaths.

He was not dead. Thank God—he was not dead! Then—and the question clutched at my heart, he being Starr, who was that other, who was the man that fought with him?

With shaking hands I loosened Rigby's collar, propping him up against the stone that all but ended his career. After a while he opened his eyes; but with reviving consciousness pain returned, and he moaned piteously. I placed him in an easier posture so that the pain abated. Then,

"Where is Noel Masterman?" I asked.

He did not know me, did not understand the full significance of the question.

"Over there," he motioned with his head towards the house on the hill.

"Why is he there?"

His lips twitched, suddenly a light of understanding gleamed in his eyes.

"Why is he there, you red-haired minx?" he gasped. "Why is Noel Masterman there? Because he's mad—stark, staring mad. We've drugged him until he's clean out of his mind; you'll never see him again; we've altered him completely, grown a beard for him, and, and——" his voice trailed off into a moan.

"Oh, heavens!" he cried, "the pain is horrible; can't you help me?"

"I can do nothing but fetch assistance. Shall I leave you?"

He nodded, white to the lips with the torture he endured. I needed no second bidding to quit the place and him. Mad! my sweetheart mad! It was a lie, a wicked, awful lie. And then the remembrance of his face, the dull look in his eyes, the strange, excited way in which he had behaved to Shackell, returned to me. I hurried along the road, pausing at the first cottage that I passed to ask for help for Rigby.

Shackell had already forestalled my request as it turned out, a party of workmen, I was informed, and a doctor, had already set out for the quarry.

My next step was to inquire the way to the house on the Hill. It was possible I might yet be in time to rescue Noel. Shackell having seen him home, would doubtless return to Rigby; it was possible that Noel was left in the custody of a stranger, who might be induced to let my sweetheart see me.

When I reached the house, however, it was empty! The front door was shut, but through a small door at the back I effected an entrance. The place was in confusion, and showed signs of a hasty departure. In one of the upstairs rooms some papers were smouldering in the grate; there were small fragments of a letter on the floor, and a portion of a telegram. I picked up the latter; there were the last syllables of two words, "ton" and "ster." The first I guessed was Templeton, in its complete form, the second was more baffling. Probably the name of a place, perhaps their next destination. Was it Chester, Manchester, Worcester—a perplexing choice presented itself. I left the house, and turned towards the town, still undecided.

I resolved to make inquiries at the L.N.W. Railway Station; perhaps the fugitives could be traced from the ticket office. On the road to the station I passed various factories—straw plaiting, blanket weaving, shoe making, all bleak and forbidding places, from which the operatives issued like captives from a prison. The silk mills were more attractive,

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architecturally speaking. Instinctively I paused, glancing up at the tall chimneys and square front. The yard door was open, a knot of men were gossiping just inside. One of them, tall, slim, and good looking, moved towards me.

"Miss Gillespie," he said softly.

And with a gasp I answered:

"Sidney Ilford!"

"You need not be afraid," he said, with all the condescension of a coward. "I've no particular instructions in regard to you at this present moment."

"Where is Noel?" I asked. "Come, Mr. Ilford, don't pretend. Surely there's no need for that at this stage of our acquaintance. I want to know where your people have taken Noel! You want—don't protest—money for the information. I'll give you a hundred pounds for his address so soon as I've verified it."

"Come inside," he said, quietly; "we can't talk here." He glanced round with apprehension.

"I daresay you'd like to take a look round the works," he added, for the benefit of the bystanders. Then he moved towards a tall, spare man, evidently an official of the premises, and asked for permission to show me round.

"The engine room is the most interesting, in my opinion," said Ilford, and showed the way into a lofty room, full of the whirl of wheels, the clatter of machinery.

A gigantic wheel, sixty feet in circumference, revolving with an incredible velocity, supplied the motive power for the whole factory. It reached up almost to the ceiling—far above one's head and down deep beneath one's feet, a shaft being driven right through the floor. A railing fenced off the opening of the shaft, high enough to stop a fall, sufficiently low to lean upon with comfort.

Irresistibly attracted, I gazed at the great wheel. Then, shaking off its fascination, turned back again to Ilford.

"You know Rigby Starr has met with an accident?"

He shook his head.

"Where?" he asked incredulously.

"In the quarry, up at Tuttle Hill, near the house where Noel was imprisoned. He's been taken from there now," I added, stopping a ready lie upon his lips. "See here, Mr. Ilford, don't waste time and talk. Will you tell me where Shackell is taking him for a hundred pounds?"

His eyes, bright with greed, gazed hungrily at mine. He moved a little closer, resting his hand upon my arm. Instinctively my hand went to my side, in involuntary protection of the notes. The action seemed to madden him.

"A thousand—I must have a thousand," he said hoarsely.

The man who looked after the machinery was engaged in another part of the room. Ilford's expression frightened me. He looked desperate, as if—the next moment an awful thing had happened.

In his eagerness Ilford had pushed me close to the railings; with a shudder of repulsion I threw myself back to escape his touch. The draught from the great wheel came like a wind on my face—a wind that caught the loose ends of my scarf, entangling them among the spokes.

In a second I was caught from the ground, suspended by my scarf. A collar as of iron seemed round my throat, a whir as of many wings flashed through my brain. A second, no more, with the next revolution of the wheel I should be dashed down the shaft, crushed out of life!

In a flash my life, its past, its present, rushed before me. My life so soon to end, and then—the wheel stopped, eager hands caught and drew me gently to the ground. Death has passed by me, but his breath had chilled my very soul.

Ilford, white and shaking, murmured some incoherent words, whether of congratulation or regret I cannot say.

"You tried to kill me," I said slowly. "It was through you my scarf caught in the wheel. You did it to rob me of Noel's money."

He protested eagerly, and after a while I accepted his denials. Finally he agreed for £100 to tell me whither Noel had been removed.

"It will take some few hours for me to discover where they have taken him, Miss Gillespie. You had better meet me at a remote place, say near Griff House, this evening at seven. I shan't know before."

"Griff House is a long way from Nuneaton."

"That's why I choose it. I dare not be seen with you nearer the town. And now if you feel able you'd better get off. If you're wise, you'll keep in hiding till to-night at seven."

But I was past wisdom so far as my own safety was concerned. Noel and Noel's danger drove considerations for myself out of my mind; the pain, the short terror of my late experience only intensified my terror for him. If I had suffered, what must he have endured?

From the mill I went to the Market Place, meaning to call at the imposing looking bank opposite the Clock Tower. I wanted to inquire if they could change two of the notes for gold. It occurred to me that Ilford might demand payment in cash. I was deterred from making the inquiry, however, by reason of the strange conduct of a small, dapper-looking man, who watched me so intently, that I felt nervous, and, suspecting him to be the agent of Templeton and Co., hastened in the other direction. To my discomfiture he followed, at a distance, truly, keeping me well in sight.

I divined the reason later. Outside the theatre, a pretty building—the one place of amusement Nuneaton boasts—a lot of loungers were gathered.

"That's Smithers," said one to the other. "I wonder what he's up to."

"And who's Smithers?" asked a man, evidently not a native.

"He's a local detective," was the reply; "no fool either, I assure you."

A detective—following me! In a flash I realised what had happened. Shackell had been to the police, in regard to the accident to Rigby, and I was being shadowed so that at any moment they could lay their hands upon me.

All the afternoon the dapper individual kept me in sight. About six, however, I contrived to give him the slip. I had had tea at the hotel, and was half-way down the Coton Road, on my way to Griff House, the early home of the great novelist, George Eliot, when the detective hove in sight. It was quite dark, and impossible to accurately distinguish the outlines of his face, but his figure betrayed him. At the moment, a girl about my size and shape, and dressed in coat and skirt, came out of a house, and commenced to walk rapidly towards the town. Creeping into the shadow of a doorway, I watched the detective pause, hesitate, and finally follow the girl instead of me.

After that my spirits rose, and I set out on my long tramp—and what a tramp it is every devotee of George Eliot, who has paid a devotional visit to her early home, can testify—with high hopes of success.

I reached the quaint old house, with its flower-gardens, green lawns, and ivy-covered walls, just after seven. There was no sign of Ilford, nor when I questioned a group of girls laughing in the porch, could I hear any report of him. No stranger had been there that afternoon, they answered me. Bright-faced, pleasure-loving lasses all of them, pupils, so they told me, of Griff House, which the County Council had of late turned into a dairy farm, where daughters of leafy Warwickshire learnt to make cheese and butter.

They gossiped with me awhile, and discussed their chances of passing the forthcoming examination in butter-making. They seemed doubtful as to their success—the "theory," they explained, was far more difficult than the "practice." I wished them all "Good luck," and envious of their quiet life and simple happiness, returned to the highway—the road to Coventry—on the look-out for Ilford.

It had struck eight when he appeared, breathless with haste.

"Follow me," he said shortly, and led the way to a coppice by the road side.

"Masterman's going to Manchester to-night in charge of Templeton. Shackell took him to Birmingham this afternoon, they start from there by the eight-forty; if you're quick——"

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There was no time for him to finish the sentence, a figure crashed from the bushes at our side, and aiming a furious blow at Ilford, cut the words short.

"Shackell!" I gasped, and, unable to move, watched the two struggling.

"Make haste, you idiot!" screamed Ilford. "He'll telegraph to stop 'em if you don't make haste."

I needed no second warning, but flew as fast as my feet would carry me down the road. I had reached the canal bridge, when the pad of pursuing footsteps struck on my ear.

I realised the situation, and knew that before me lay the toughest struggle I had yet encountered.

It was past eight; the train left Birmingham in half an hour, if Shackell reached the Post Office before me—if I got there first—my breath came in great sobs, I staggered on, until the lamps of a receding cart flashed into view. With a mighty effort I put on a spurt, gained the cart's side, and clambered up. The shouts of Shackell came down upon the wind.

I urged the driver to put on top speed.

"I want to reach the Post Office." I gasped, "important wire."

"It's too late, miss," was the answer, "the office shuts at eight, you must go to the L. N. W. station; you can send a telegram from the signal-box."

"Are you going that way?" I asked.

"Only as far as Coton Road; we'll put you down there."

We drove off through the darkness, at a steady jog-trot, that not all my prayers could increase. I seemed to hear Shackell gaining upon us, over and over again I caught his voice shouting to us to stop. Thank Heaven! the driver did not hear him.

We stopped at Coton Road, and with hasty thanks I climbed down and ran along the dark, quiet streets. Through the Market Place, past the Clock Tower, past the theatre, where I heard those footsteps behind me, that voice calling me to stop.

At last the station comes in sight, I run into the platform, and essay to cross the line. An indignant porter drags me back, and points out the subway. I make a headlong dash down the steps. Up the steps at the other end, then I fly down the platform, and cover the distance between it and the signal-box in a flash.

Up the steps, rickety and dangerous, into the signal-box, slamming the door behind me, and then rapping violently upon the window, I call out to the clerk:

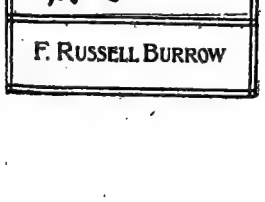
"No time to write," I cry, and dictate a long and rambling message. As I turn to go, Shackell rushes on to the steps, a telegraph form in his hand.

"Too late," I cry, "too late. The eight-forty has left for Birmingham, and I—I shall have it met at Manchester."

For answer Shackell moves aside, and motions to someone behind to approach.

I find myself face to face with the detective!

(The concluding instalment of "The Pursuit of Sara" next week.)



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Your Editor Chats.

I have great pleasure in announcing that the winner of the guinea offered by me in respect to the first Unsolved Love Problem, "The Awkward Predicament of Edward Clements," is Mr. Chas. G. F. Chute, of 3, Belleville Avenue, Rathgar Road, and heartily I congratulate him upon his success. Although there were many interesting replies sent in, I consider that his was the best, both in good arguments and lucid reasoning.

I am glad to see that this feature has taken on so remarkably well, and next week I hope to be able to announce the winner in the Second Problem, "The Mistake of Millicent Howard."

Those who intend sending in replies to the Fourth Problem, "The Doubt of Mildred Dalrymple," must note that the latest day on which I can receive their letters is Friday, December 4th. None arriving after this date will be considered.

Mrs. S. McQuillin, 12 Carlton Street, Welford Road, Leicester, is the fortunate person who wins the Gramophone I offered for distributing leaflets advertising "The Pursuit of Sara." I sincerely trust that Mrs. McQuillin, who pressed her little son and her daughter into her service, will spend many a happy evening through the long winter months listening to the enjoyable entertainment of the prize she has won.

The week after next will appear our grand Christmas Number. I hope you are making a note in your diary to order your copy early, for I fully expect that the issue will soon run out of print, and then you will be sorry that you missed it.

Besides the splendid humorous story by Mr. W. Pett Ridge, which nobody could read without a hearty laugh, and the numerous other fine stories and illustrations that go to make up the number, there will be the opening chapters of a marvellous new serial story from the pen of your favourite writer, Blanche Eardley. She it was who wrote: "The Bond Between," a romance that you were all delighted with, and so you will be with "Dupes of Destiny," the title of the coming story, because it is quite up to her very best standard. Besides this, there will be many valuable prizes offered in connection with some novel and interesting competitions.

In our next issue "The Pursuit of Sara" concludes. The city of Manchester is the scene of the final instalment, and I think that you will all agree that the end is a brilliant climax to a thrilling series. Those who have followed Miss Gillespie throughout her adventures will doubtless be very eager to learn how love triumphs in her case over everything, and what befalls the hard-hearted scoundrels who are the cause of all the mischief. I can assure you that the concluding instalment is also a very enthralling one.

Your Editor.

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CLAUDIA'S RETALIATION.

The Story of a Hasty Conclusion.

"THAT must be Harold ringing me up!" cried Claudia Silburn as the whirring tinkle of the bell made itself heard from the small room at the end of the hall. "He is about to leave the office and he wishes to tell me that he will be here a little before the agreed time, I expect!"

She sprang from her seat and made her way to the door; Mrs. Silburn, placidly working through the maze of some very fancy crochet work, looked up in time to catch a glimpse of the happy face of her daughter, and the sight of those sparkling eyes and the flushed cheeks carried her thoughts back with a rush to the time when she was Claudia's age and also just engaged to the man of her choice.

Claudia went swiftly across the intervening space in order to reach the instrument before anyone else could answer it. The telephone was so convenient! She was glad that her father, a not-too-successful general practitioner, had taken advantage of the introduction of the "message rate" system to have the instrument installed in his house.

A moment later, Mrs. Silburn heard the following remarks through the two open doors:

"Yes, I am Miss Silburn!" A pause. "Oh!" in a tone of mingled disappointment and vexation; "thank you! I understand! Good-bye!" And then the combined receiver and transmitter was replaced on the hooks with quite unnecessary vigour.

"I won't tolerate it!" Claudia declared hotly, as she tumultuously re-entered the sitting-room and threw herself in her chair. "I wonder if Harold thinks he can play with me in *that* way!" This last remark was uttered in a scornful tone.

"Mother," she continued, turning to that worthy lady, who still sat placidly at her work, "can you imagine anything so—so rude and off-hand? Here is Harold actually getting his office boy—his *office boy!*—to ring me up and tell me that he is sorry that he cannot keep the appointment for this evening because he wishes to attend a meeting of the directors of his company, the Neverdull Paint Co.! I know very well that he is not bound to attend these meetings except *very* rarely; he was telling me only the other day that he was glad it was so, because they usually hold their meetings when everybody else wanted to go home!"

Claudia stopped through a deficiency of breath and an excess of indignation.

Mrs. Silburn looked up at the excited face of her daughter, noting mentally that Claudia appeared really very beautiful when she was cross, and was about to make some soothing reply when Claudia found breath enough to continue.

"He is commencing rather early, I think! Here have we been engaged one week only, and he slips away from the office early to keep an appointment which has more attraction for him—a music hall, very likely!—instead of coming to see me, as promised, and gets his office boy to ring me up at the proper time and tell me that he must attend a meeting of old directors!"

She ceased speaking once more, and Mrs. Silburn said a few words in her usual calm manner.

"Your father slipped away while we were on our honeymoon in order to play a game of cricket with his team, my dear, and he has turned out to be a very creditable husband, as, I suppose, you will admit!"

"Oh, yes! But then papa is different from Harold and—I don't care if he has gone cricketing or anywhere else. I call it downright neglect, and if I allow it now, what shall I have to put up with after marriage, I should like to know? And he has the audacity to say, through the office boy, that he is free of engagements for to-morrow evening!

"Free of engagements!" she repeated, as the significance of the phrase struck her. "I will see to that! He shall be quite free; he may conclude that our engagement is broken and that he can look out for another girl to deceive! I'll write to him so that he knows it first thing to-morrow morning!"

Mrs. Silburn sighed, her daughter was not like her, for she took things very equably, while Claudia was impulsive.

Mrs. Silburn thought of interfering, but she decided not to do so. Every generation must gain its experience in its own way and an impetuous nature can seldom be calmed without dashing itself against the rocks of suffering. Claudia would not listen to her if she spoke, she was afraid!

The girl had seated herself at a little writing-table and was viciously dipping the pen in the ink. She forgot the usual form of letter writing, and began at once, without address or date.

"My dear H——"

"No, that won't do!" she decided. "He isn't that any longer. I can alter the 'H' into 'M' and make it 'Mr.' quite easily!"

She did so. It did not look very well, and, moreover, why should she call him "My dear Mr. Churchill"? She tore up the sheet of notepaper, took another and dashed off the following:

DEAR MR. CHURCHILL—*I received your message through the intermediary of your office assistant. I understand that you are, or wish to be, free of all engagements to-morrow evening, so I hasten to let you know that I shall be too busy to-morrow evening to see anybody. Yours truly,* C. S.

"There!" she cried, passing the letter to her mother,

"That will teach him that he mustn't play with the young ladies of the present day. It may have been all right in your time, mother, but this is different!"

"It's rather stiff, isn't it, Claudia?" ventured Mrs. Silburn. "It looks as if you didn't want him to call again!"

"I don't mind what it looks like!" said Claudia. Her mother's words caused a peculiar little sensation to strike her in the region of the heart, but she crushed it ruthlessly. "It means that I am not easily hoodwinked and not to be trifled with. I have read a good many things about husbands having to stay late at the office, and all that, and I shall nip it in the bud."

She folded the sheet of paper with much emphasis, pushed it into the envelope, sealed it, and took up a postage stamp.

"I'll post it at once!" she remarked, affixing the stamp in position with a vigorous dab.

She ran out with just her hat on, and jerked the letter into the slot of the wall-box about fifty yards from the house. She had just missed the 7.10 collection, so it would go by the 8.25. That was rather a pity, as the letter might have reached him the same evening if she had caught the 7.10. Well, it would make him uncomfortable at breakfast!

She went back to the sitting-room and took up her sewing once more. Needlework is a soothing occupation to those who are fond of it; Claudia liked it, which was somewhat surprising in a girl of such impulsive disposition, and after half an hour, she began to feel that she had been too hasty.

She tried to crush the feeling, but it rose to the surface in spite of her efforts, and her cheeks began to burn.

A sound caused her to start; it was the well-known ring of the telephone bell. For the second time that evening, Claudia dropped her work and hastened to answer the summons.

She shut the door behind her, so Mrs. Silburn could not hear any of the conversation. Three minutes later, Claudia returned with her face wreathed in smiles. It was the old happy look and Mrs. Silburn smiled wisely.

"Oh, mother, I wonder how I could have thought so ill of dear Harold. He has just rung me up to explain. The directors' meeting was unexpected; it was called by telegram this afternoon, and Harold thought it would be a good idea to take advantage of the occasion. He tried to ring up this afternoon so as to tell me himself and in good time, but the foolish girls at the exchange kept telling him that they could get no answer from us. At last he got through, but just at that moment he was called in to the room where the directors of the Neverdull Paint Co. were sitting, so he had to give a hurried message to the boy. He wished to attend the meeting in order to get the directors to settle on his leave of absence for our wedding, because, so he says"—this with a deep blush—"he is not going to wait! I am *so* sorry that I——"

"What's the matter, dear?" asked her mother, disturbed out of her equability for the first time by seeing Claudia's cheeks suddenly lose their bright colour and become deadly pale.

"I have posted that cruel letter, mother!" came slowly from the girl's lips. "What shall I do? He has left the office now, but it won't matter how much I explain, he will read the letter and he will think—— Oh, dear! I can't bear to imagine what he will think! I must get that letter back! I'll fish it out of the box with a piece of string and a gummed pad at the end, or I'll stick it with a wire skewer or something! It mustn't go!"

It was a hopeless kind of notion, and Claudia realised it when she began to make hasty preparations for carrying it into effect; but she finally determined to have a good try with the skewer! Meanwhile, the large hand of the clock was hurrying towards twenty-five minutes past, while the hour hand was painfully climbing towards the nine. Thus it came about that, while Claudia was engaged in the impossible task of inserting the skewer and her fingers into the slot in such a way as to effect the object she had in view, a hand was placed on her shoulder and a man's voice exclaimed:

"Trying to steal the letters, by Jingo! Got you this time, my lady!"

It was the postman come to collect the letters from the box at 8.25! Claudia uttered a cry of dismay.

"Oh, I am not trying to steal them, Mr. Postman, indeed I am not! You know me well enough, and you wouldn't think me guilty of that! I have dropped a letter into the box which I don't wish to go now! Will you give it back to me?"

"Can't do it, miss!" returned the man stoutly. He recognised Miss Silburn and dropped the accusation of stealing. "As soon as a letter is dropped into that 'ere box, miss, it is the property of His Majesty's Postmaster-General, you know! I can't do anything for you!"

"But I can tell you which one it is and who it is addressed to!" pleaded Claudia earnestly. "It will make several people unhappy now, if that letter goes. There!" as the man opened the box. "You will see it, for there are only three. It is the one in the lavender envelope."

"This is the one, I expect," said the man, picking up the lavender envelope and holding it tightly, lest Claudia should make a clutch at it. "I'm very sorry, but I can't give it to you! Hallo! Why, if you haven't slipped it in the box without addressing it!"

It was a fact! Claudia gazed at the blank envelope, with the red stamp fixed to the top right-hand corner, and vaguely wondered if this omission would help her. The man soon explained the position.

"That letter will come back to you, miss! When they get hold of it at the G.P.O., the first man will sling it into the 'blind' box, as they call it. That's when the letters ain't plainly addressed or anything o' that sort. After that, your letter will find its way to the Dead Letter Office; they'll open it, see your address and return it to you, unless you've put the name and address of the other party inside, which ladies don't do, as a rule! Good evening, miss! I hope as it'll be all right!"

He swung the door to with a clang and continued his round of collection. Claudia gave a happy little laugh and sped back home, dropping the skewer unconsciously as she ran along.

"There was no address inside, so they can't send it back to me or anyone else!" she laughed. "Oh, how glad I am!"

G. E. Lingen.

Handwriting Indicates Character.

So if you would like to know something about your own character and disposition, you should send a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped, addressed envelope, to RANEE, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. A reliable delineation of your character will be sent in return.

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POWERFUL ROMANCE.

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY:

Isolo Staunton, a criminal millionaire, who was once a convict on the Chincha Islands. He is the ruler of a kingdom under the sea, of the existence of which nobody knows. Here he forges in great number coins of every nationality. With the wealth he is amassing he intends to form a United States of South America and to make himself President.

Mercedes Staunton, his beautiful daughter, who falls in love with

Wilfrid Ellerton, a young man of whom Isolo Staunton is greatly afraid because he holds it in his power to send the millionaire back as a convict to the Chincha Islands. So Staunton secures Ellerton on board the *Isola*, his magnificent yacht, and consigns him to the Underworld. It is then given out that the young man has fallen overboard and been drowned.

Don Ramiero Valdez y Valdivia.—The right-hand friend and confidant of Staunton. He carries out the kidnapping of Ellerton.

M. Herarra.—The viceroy of Staunton in the Underworld.

Stanislaus Smith.—A detective, who is endeavouring to find the perpetrators of the colossal coin frauds. He lives a double life as Herr de Ronski, the famous musician, but only his wife and daughter, Paula, and Arthur Dennison, a Treasury solicitor, know of this.

Derrick Kesteven.—The partner of Staunton in all his great schemes. He has a beautiful daughter, named Cora.

Captain Percy Iddison and Lady Maud Hyam.—Two engaged persons who have suspicions about the nuss Nolousness of Staunton.

Janet Yuill.—A nurse who is taken on board the *Isola* to tend Mercedes, who falls ill when she hears of the alleged death of Ellerton. She there meets her husband, Herbert Darfield, once Arthur Culworth, criminal, and her suspicions are aroused.

TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

The Mint Below the Sea.

"Yes," continued Ellerton, getting up and stretching himself, "I certainly should prefer a stroll after dinner instead of sitting down. I don't seem to have had much exercise lately. In fact, I feel more as though I were just recovering from a pretty bad illness."

"Which is exactly the case, Señor," replied Herarra, lying with a certain amount of truth. "I can assure you that your recent illness has not only been serious but prolonged."

"I suppose so," said Ellerton, beginning to walk up and down the room as he lighted his cigar. "Though, of course, I don't recollect anything about it. What was it, by the way?"

"An injury to the brain, followed by fever," replied Herarra according to instructions, "and now, if you are ready, we will go."

"With pleasure," said Ellerton. "I have distant memories of being very fond of engineering and chemistry, and I suppose that down here you have to depend on science for most, at any rate, of your necessaries and luxuries, saving, of course, your champagne and cigars, and that very excellent coffee, which, I presume, is not grown in a world without a sun?"

"No, no, naturally not," laughed Herarra. "Those come from what I may call another world—one of which your happily recovered memory doubtless affords you some pleasant if distant recollections."

"My worthy host has either been drinking too much champagne, or he must think he has got me very tight," mused Ellerton.

The fact was that, in a sense, Herarra was beginning to feel that the despot who held his liberty, indeed his life, in his hands, had put him into a somewhat difficult position.

For one thing he never expected that his prisoner-guest would be a man who could speak English and Spanish so perfectly, and could thus converse with both the slaves and the officials of his domain. In his own line he was one of the most expert criminals in the world, but his intelligence was limited to his craft, and, with the usual suspicion of his kind, he did not like Ellerton's queries as to the source of light and heat in his new world—of which he was himself entirely ignorant.

At the same time, believing as he did, that he would never leave the Underworld alive, he had no hesitation in obeying his instructions to allow Ellerton to learn all he liked, and to make himself useful to his captors.

Could he have foreseen the possible result of doing this, slave and all as he practically was, he would have taken the law into his own hands, and Ellerton would not have lived many minutes after he opened the steel door leading into the central chamber.

He felt instinctively that he had to deal with a man of a much higher intelligence than himself and he was disagreeably puzzled. At the same time, until he received further orders from the Lord of this World of Criminals he was helpless, and those orders could not possibly reach him until the *Isola* returned to the anchorage and re-established communication with the outside world. If he could have read the idea which was already working in Ellerton's mind this narrative would never have been written.

"That contrivance is not only distinctly ingenious but it hasn't been invented and installed here without some very

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definite purpose. I wonder whatever these people are doing down here. Under the sea and yet in communication with the other world, obviously by means of the yacht. What does it mean? Well, I suppose I shall find it out some day, if I live."

Thus Wilfrid Ellerton thought to himself as he watched the opening and the closing of the door. When they got into the central chamber, Herarra said:

"Now, as you reminded me that you are interested in engineering matters we will pay our first visit to Señor Battley's domain."

As they reached the opening of the Gallery towards which Herarra led the way, one of the grey clad figures rose from the ground out of the shadows, raised his hands to his forehead, and cried:

"Hail, master!"

Herarra nodded, and at the same moment Ellerton heard a bell tinkle and saw a light sparkle from the roof of the gallery about a hundred feet away.

"It looks as though we were expected," he said as they walked towards the light.

"The unexpected, Señor," replied Herarra out of the depths of his unsuspecting ignorance, "does not happen here."

"What a very admirable organisation you must have," said Ellerton with a laugh. "What a pity it is I have forgotten all this. Still, I suppose I shall have plenty of time to re-learn it all."

"On that subject, Señor, I think you can set your mind at rest. I can assure you that you will have ample time."

"Yes, I thought so," said Ellerton to himself, "that means imprisonment for life if they can do it," and then he went on aloud:

"It will be most interesting, I am sure. Yes, good evening again, Mr. Battley," he continued in English, as they stopped under the lamp and the engineer came forward to meet his master.

Their eyes met for an instant and then Mr. Battley turned his head away and Herarra said rather sharply:

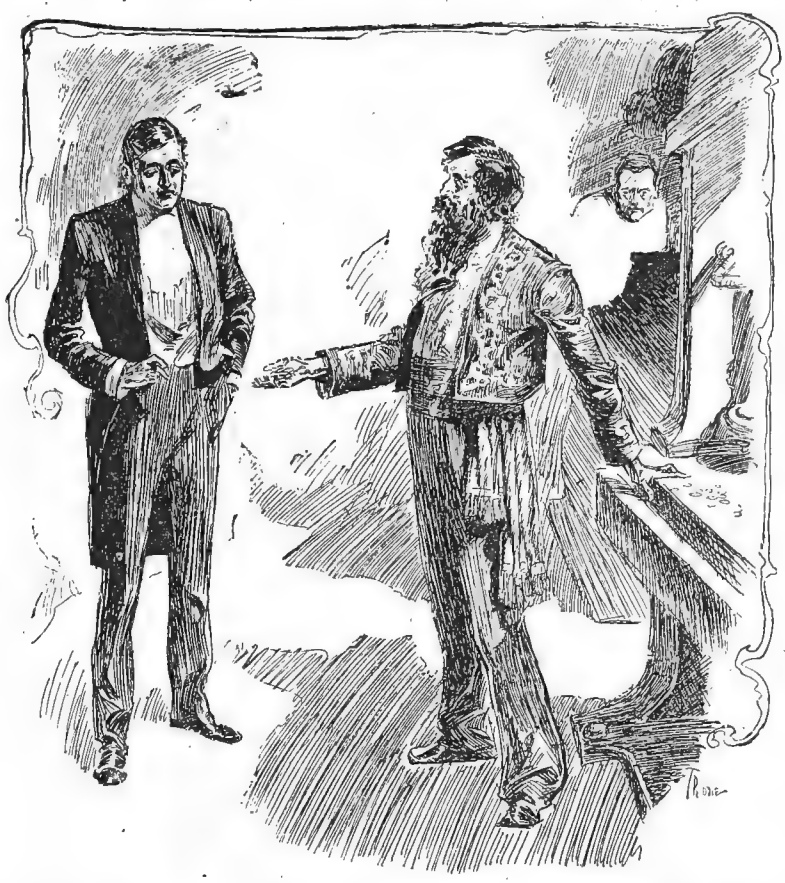
"We have come to have a look at the machinery. Mr. Ellerton is interested in that sort of thing."

"In everything, sir?" asked Mr. Battley, raising his eyes for a moment.

"Yes, everything, why not? Is he not a dweller amongst us?"

"It is as you wish, sir," said the engineer, wondering how he was going to get through the unexpectedly unpleasant experience. In one sense he was disconcerted and in another reassured by the fact that Ellerton continued to treat him as an absolute stranger.

Herarra led the way through a narrow tunnel, partly natural and partly hewn out of what certainly looked to Ellerton like the foundations of the world. This was about a hundred feet long, and when they were half way through, a light shone out from the farther end. As they passed under this Ellerton found himself in another tunnel much higher and broader than the one they had come through. He guessed it to be some fifty feet high and seventy-five broad.



Herarra showed Ellerton some of the coins they manufactured in the Underworld.

To his left hand, standing on a platform of levelled rock he saw three little engines, each with double fly-wheels, revolving at a tremendous speed and making a sound something like the purring of a dynamo. So far as he could see there were no boilers or steam pipes and yet the engines were of the ordinary double cylinder type, and from each of the fly-wheels a driving band ran up to a shafting in the roof. From the shafting other bands ran down to twenty-four machines which looked to him like stamping or cutting machines. There were twelve of these on each side of the gallery and in front of each of them was a pile of ingots of white metal. At every machine there were two of the grey-clad silent figures which had already become unpleasantly familiar to him.

"You don't seem to use steam with your engines, Mr. Battley," he asked in a tone of half careless inquiry.

"May I ask what your motive-power is?"

"Heat, sir," he replied, as though he were anxious to take refuge in a technical explanation. "You see we are fortunately situated here. We have that part of the work done for us and these engines which I had the honour of designing, merely translate the heat into energy and so we get the work done with very little trouble."

"And where do you get your heat from?"

"Oh, from the volcano, or rather from its tributaries, if I may call them so, of lava. I shall be happy to explain the whole process to you at any time it will suit you."

"Thanks," replied Ellerton, "I'll come round to-morrow, if you can give me an hour, but from what you say, I take it that they are really hot-air engines."

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"Yes, sir," replied Mr. Battley, "to a certain extent, but, to put it shortly, they are driven by superheated air under great pressure, so great indeed that, but for the amount of heat, the air would be almost liquid."

"I think I see," said Ellerton, remembering the stolen specifications, "but we can go into that to-morrow. I have got a sort of recollection of a plan of the and, which, perhaps, I dreamt about."

As he said this he looked hard at Mr. Battley, who dropped his eyelids and turned away to look at one of the engines.

"And what might these machines be doing, Señor?" Ellerton continued in Spanish. "Like the rest, I have forgotten all about them."

"Let us go and see them, then," replied Herarra, moving towards the nearest of them, "I think you will very soon remember what they are."

It certainly did not take Ellerton very long to find out what they were, for a single glance at the first one of them told him that it was as perfect a minting machine as the wit of man had as yet devised.

The moment they had entered all the grey figures ceased work at the machines and stood to attention like so many school-boys, looking down at the rock-floor of the gallery.

Herarra looked round at them and exclaimed in a loud, harsh tone:

"Work, slaves!"

And instantly every motionless figure started into activity and the feeding of the machines was renewed.

Ellerton looked keenly at his host for a moment and said:

"I see that you employ slave labour, and," he continued, going behind one of the machines and looking at a pile of bright new silver coins, "you apparently find it, if you will excuse the play on the words, a money-making business. I never saw a better five-franc piece in my life. And these machines of yours seem to turn them out very quickly."

"Yes," laughed Herarra, "it is as you see," taking up a handful of the coins, "and as for speed, each machine can turn out its six thousand an hour, and as we mint only the larger values such as crowns, five-franc pieces, and dollars, we not only make money, but we make profits."

"And pretty large ones, too, I should think," said Ellerton, "provided always that you can spend the money, which you can hardly do here. Wherefore it stands to reason that these pretty things are made for export."

"Naturally," was the reply, "our goods find a most ready sale, I can assure you."

"No doubt. They are excellently made," said Ellerton shortly, as he walked on down the line of machines. "Ah, and I see you manufacture gold goods as well."

"Oh, yes, of all denominations. It is not quite as profitable perhaps as the silver manufacture, but as these for whom we work own their own mines, we have some knowledge of metallurgy, there is no fear of loss. And now," he went on, moving away into the middle of the chamber, "if you will follow me, I will show you another process of what you rightly called our money-making."

Ellerton followed him, thinking pretty hard all the time, into the central gallery, and down through another arched tunnel on the other side, which opened out into a large chamber somewhat similarly fitted with engines and machines, but the latter differed considerably from those they had just left. The slaves stood to attention as before, and were curtly ordered to go on with their work. The visitor glanced at the machines, and said:

"Ah, this is a much more profitable department even than the other, I presume. Here you must make millions—and most excellent forgeries they are, I must admit," he went on slowly, picking up a dozen or so of bank-notes of various nationalities and denominations.

"Pardon, Señor," Herarra corrected, "these are not forgeries, they are genuine in every sense; they are printed on genuine paper from blocks identical with those used in other manufacturies. There is no difference save in the authority by which they are made. When you have once got that far it is a simple process. Here is a piece of paper worth nothing. There is a block worth a few shillings. Bring the two into proper connection, and you have a thousand francs or a hundred pounds."

"Admirably simple!" laughed Ellerton briefly, for he was thinking harder than ever. "And now, what about the light and heat problem?" he continued, after a short pause. "All this is, of course, very wonderful and interesting, but I think that question would interest me even more. Will there be time to have a look into that question to-night, if one may use such a term here?"

"I fear not, Señor," replied Herarra, looking at his watch, "you see it is getting near what we call sleeping-time, and the works will be stopped in a few minutes. After breakfast, of course, if you wish."

"That will do just as well," replied Ellerton, who was beginning to feel a little sleepy and was, moreover, looking forward to the dreams in which he might perchance escape from this prison-land and rejoin his beloved Mercedes, wherever she might be now.

"But, look here, Señor," he continued. "I am quite well now and I don't want any attendants—I mean, of the sort you gave me when I was ill. Of course, if you can give me a decent servant, say one of these poor wretches that you call slaves, to look after me, well and good."

"Your wish shall be obeyed," was the reply. "There are several of them trained to personal service, and you can take your choice."

Half an hour later Ellerton was in bed in his gorgeous chamber, thinking hard of all he had seen and heard during the day until the thoughts got confused and melted away into oblivion, and ere long he found himself with Mercedes on the deck of the *Isola*, which, by some magic, changed into a submarine and started out on a trip to discover the entrance to the Land beneath the Sea.

TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Clue upon Clue.

Precisely at a quarter to two Dennison and Captain Iddison announced themselves at the Grand Hotel, Cimiez. M. de Ronski was waiting for them in the vestibule. He came forward and took Dennison by both hands in his admirably simulated foreign manner, saying in equally admirable foreign English:

"Welcome, my dear Monsieur Dennison, welcome. And this is your friend, the gallant Captain of whom you told me. Sir," he continued, turning to Iddison, "I am charmed to meet you. Please follow me. We shall find the ladies upstairs."

Iddison shook hands, and they went upstairs, Dennison saying to himself:

"Excellently done, my dear Mr. Smith. No wonder no one has ever penetrated that disguise of yours. Won't Iddison open his eyes when he's introduced to your other self!"

It would hardly have conduced to Lady Maud's temporary peace of mind could she have read the exact thoughts which passed through her engineer's soul during his introduction to Madame de Ronski and Paula. Not that his allegiance was shaken in the least, but no woman is quite so perfect as not to feel a trifle uncomfortable when she finds her lover in the company of a more beautiful woman than herself, though wild horses would not drag the admission out of him; and that is why Iddison's thoughts would not just

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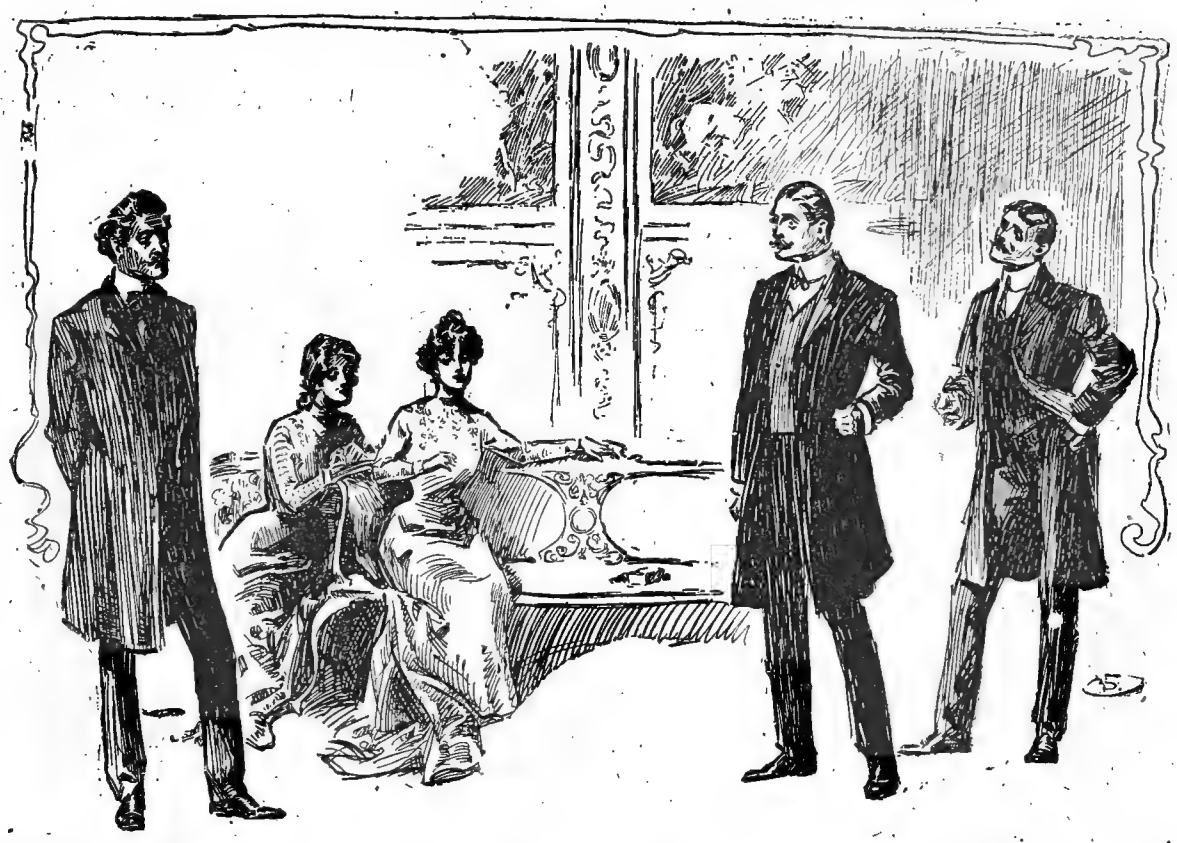

Captain Iddison was astounded when he was informed of the identity between Herr de Ronski and Stanislaus Smith.

then have been pleasant ones for his best beloved. As a matter of fact Madame de Ronski and Paula were by far the two most lovely women he had ever seen in his life, and, to himself, he frankly confessed that they were.

During lunch, de Ronski remained de Ronski, and the conversation ran on the general topics of the place and hour, from the last scandal of the Casino to the possibilities of war in the Near East. But when the cloth was removed and the waiter had brought the coffee and cigars and disappeared, Madame gave permission for cigarettes by lighting one herself, and de Ronski went out and locked the door of the outer room. When he came back he said to Dennison, in a voice totally unfamiliar to his friend:

"And now, my dear Dennison, as we are all quite assured that you would not have suggested that you should introduce Captain Iddison to me as well as to my friend de Ronski without some very good reason, and as we are quite alone now, the other introduction may as well take place at once."

"I beg your pardon, but what the—— I'm awfully sorry, but what in the name of impossibility does this mean?" exclaimed the soldier, getting up and staring blankly from his host to Dennison, "I was under the impression——"

"And a perfectly correct impression too, my dear fellow," laughed Dennison, hugely enjoying the bewildered expression of his friend's face. "This is Stanislas de Ronski, the musician of more than European fame. But he happens to be one of those fortunate men who possess two identities, and have come by both of them honestly. Allow me to present to you Mr. Stanislaus Smith, our London Chief of the International Police."

What Iddison would have said had there been no ladies present may be guessed at. What he did say, when he had sufficiently recovered himself, was:

"It's no use saying that I'm astounded, because the word doesn't half express it, and so you must take my feelings for granted. Mr. Smith I know, and M. de Ronski I know, but to find them both in the same person is almost beyond the limits of human credulity."

"Nevertheless, you see, it is true," smiled his host, passing his hand through his wig. "Were I to remove my professional adornment you would have no doubt of it."

"Oh, I have none, I can assure you," answered Iddison, still laughing, "I'm quite ready to take your word for it." And now he went on more seriously, "I suppose you will allow me to ask why a very humble person like myself should be permitted to learn a secret which cannot be known to many people in the world?"

"It is known only to those who are in this room," said Madame de Ronski, handing him a cup of coffee, and I don't suppose it will ever be known to any more."

"Not through me, of course," said the engineer stiffening up as he took the cup.

"That would be impossible," said Mr. Smith quickly. "And now that we understand each other let us get to business," he went on, sitting down. "My friend Dennison tells me that you were one of the guests on board Mr. Staunton's yacht when that unfortunate affair about poor young Ellerton happened. To save time, Captain, I am going to ask you, point-blank, whether you have any reasons for suspecting that that was not altogether an accident?"

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The directness and the utter unexpectedness of the question, as he would have said, stumped the soldier for a moment. Then he replied quite quietly:

"I know that you would not ask me that without very good reason, and so I will tell you candidly that I find it very difficult to believe that it was an accident. In fact it seemed to me, as well as to—well, Lady Maud Hyam, whom I am going to marry shortly, that it could not possibly have been one."

"Then if your suspicions are correct," said Mr. Smith slowly, "it must have been murder, and people don't commit murder without motives."

"That's exactly what bowls us out completely," replied Iddison, "but at the same time there is another very funny thing to be accounted for, if it can be. When Miss Staunton, who, as perhaps Dennison has told you, fell suddenly in love with poor Ellerton, and apparently as deeply as he did with her, became so seriously ill, why did her father leave her, and why did the yacht go to Iceland when she was evidently bound for the Riviera? That's what I'd like to know."

"And that is what a good many others would be very glad to know," said Mr. Smith. "Now, may I ask, Captain Iddison, if you could tell me anything more about the circumstances of what we may call Mr. Ellerton's disappearance?"

"Nothing of any importance, I am afraid," he replied, "except perhaps one thing that struck me, which so far I haven't mentioned to anybody, not even to Lady Maud, because I didn't want to upset her. I was awake when the accident happened and my porthole was open. I heard the cry of 'Man overboard!' and I saw through my porthole one of the boats splash down.

"Of course I jumped into my deck shoes and started for the deck. I found the saloon entrance locked. I tried at the smoking-room, but that was locked also, and that had never been done before during the trip. I must confess that to me it looked rather as though they intended the accident to be strictly private."

"Very likely," said Dennison, "if it was not an accident they would naturally not have wanted anyone like yourself to jump over after him."

"That certainly is a point, or rather a link in the chain, if a small one," said Mr. Smith, musingly, "and it may possibly have something to do with the main problem which we have in hand, a problem of which I am almost beginning to think even Mr. Ellerton's disappearance is only a part."

"You mean, of course, the great Silver Problem, papa," said Paula, leaning her elbows on the table and looking not without a certain maidenly admiration at Iddison's bronzed, clear-cut features and splendid length of limb. "Of course you have heard about that, Captain?"

"What," he exclaimed, looking round, "this mysterious flooding of the markets with money and notes which the Mints can't account for? Naturally I have heard of that, but surely, Miss de Ronski, you don't mean to suggest that Mr. Staunton, the great millionaire and financier, a man who, I am told, is a friend of statesmen and princes, could have anything to do with a swindle like that?"

"There is no telling nowadays, you know, how people get rich. I mean so very, very rich," she replied gently. "I don't make any charge against him, but, as papa will tell you, there are other things. For instance, why did the *Isola* go to Iceland to get here, and how did she manage to go to Iceland and get back here in about the same time that it would have taken her to come from Scotland, and, lastly, why did Mr. Staunton tell Lady Medcalf-Mears that they had come from Leith and say nothing at all about Iceland?

"Now," she continued, smiling, "I think it's a little bit suspicious."

"Certainly it is," replied Iddison, "especially as if he really did go to Iceland in an honest fashion, the yacht's papers should show it."

"That is also a point," said Mr. Smith, "and one which I shall clear up now. My friends at the Customs tell me that, according to her papers, she came straight from the port of Leith."

"Then in that case," said Dennison, "granted always that Miss Yuill was not mistaken, and I don't see how she could be, that trip to Iceland was a strictly private one. Now I wonder whether that has anything to do with Ellerton's disappearance, or the other thing."

"I think we are gradually getting out of the fog," said Mr. Smith, staring hard up at the ceiling. "We have certainly got far enough to permit ourselves to look upon Mr. Staunton and his millions with a certain amount of suspicion. And then there is another point. This yacht is registered as of twenty-one knots speed, and such a journey would be absolutely impossible unless she possessed a speed which not even the fastest destroyers could equal. Why is the fact of that speed concealed when I will say an honest owner of such a wonderful craft would be only too proud not only to admit it, but to prove it against all the ocean raters of the world?"

"Yes," said Dennison, "that is undoubtedly so. If an American millionaire had a thirty-five or forty knotter, as she must be, he'd put the American Eagle on her bows and go screaming over the Seven Seas. Yes, as you say, we're getting nearer. Go ahead, my friend."

"Then," continued their host, taking a thousand franc bank-note and a photograph of Pedro Ramiero out of his breast pocket, "we have these," and he proceeded to explain their inner meaning to Iddison.

"Oh, that's the man I met in the box last night," said Iddison, "right enough. A little younger and not so prosperous looking, but still, if I know anything about faces, that's either Don Ramiero Valdez or his twin brother. Another link, I suppose, or a mesh in the web that you appear to be weaving."

"And which I now believe we shall weave," said Mr. Smith decisively. "We have far to go yet, but, as I said, we are getting on. I am very glad to have your independent opinion of the photograph. Now this note," he went on, "had on it, or rather in it, a mark which can only be detected by those who know where to find it by the microscope. I may explain that as the counterfeit notes are so perfect that if you put one beside a genuine note of the same number an expert could not tell the difference. All genuine notes are now marked in this way by a high official after they have been delivered by the printers, so that even if the original block were stolen we could tell the notes printed from it to be forgeries. Now this note," he went on, taking one out of his pocket-book, "is a forgery, and it came from the *Isola*, and was cashed by the original of this photograph."

"Great Scott, you don't say so," exclaimed Iddison, for the moment half forgetting his perfect manners. "I should think that, as the children say, you are getting warm."

"I hope so," said Mr. Smith, "but warm is not hot, you know, and therefore it may be some time before we strike the iron. And now, Captain Iddison," he went on, looking steadily at him, "have you any objection to assist the course of justice by helping to lay the man whom I believe to be the greatest criminal of modern times by the heels?"

"You mean Staunton, I suppose?"

The detective nodded.

"It would be excellent sport," continued Iddison thoughtfully, "but, you see, it's hardly playing the game to accept a man's hospitality and help to run him in, is it? Besides, I should hardly like to take Lady Maud on to his pirate yacht, or whatever it is, under the circumstances. Of course you are not absolutely certain. Lots of good men have been suspected. Still I don't think I can help you in any detective way."

"Oh, no," said Mr. Smith, interrupting him, "by no means. That is the last thing I should ask you to do. I must have expressed myself clumsily. I should have asked you whether you were willing to tell our mutual friend Dennison anything that you may notice in connection with Mr. Staunton or the yacht during your visits."

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"Oh, of course I could do that," said Iddison, "even if I had not come here to-day, and I'll tell you what else I'll do. I believe Miss Yuill knows a little more than she told me. I don't mind having another talk with her, and, if you like, giving her a hint that there are distinct suspicions that everything is not right about the *Isola*. I'm quite certain that she has suspicions herself. If you like, too, I shall be most happy to bring you into personal communication with her."

"That is not at all a bad idea, Captain," said Mr. Smith, "but it will have to be done carefully, and I must see her in my other capacity. Yes, it is the thing to do, and I will do it."

TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

A Council of War.

On the morning of the same day, a little after eleven, Isolo Staunton was sitting at the head of the table in the Council Chamber, with Kesteven on his right and Don Ramiero on his left.

Five other gentlemen, all of unmistakably Spanish or Spanish-American appearance, dark or black-haired, bright-eyed, and bearded or moustachioed, were also seated round the table, each with a small dispatch-box and writing materials before him. The end of the table at which Staunton sat was covered with papers, mostly tied in bundles with green tape.

He looked not unlike a Chancellor or a Prime Minister holding a Cabinet meeting, and, as a matter of fact, the similé was not very far wrong, for these gentlemen, who were not incorrectly supposed to be his financial associates, were also a good deal more—they were literally the Ministers of a Government of which he was the head, a Government which it had been the ambition of his life to establish over one of the vastest divisions of the world, which only needed a strong united rule to make it also one of the richest and most powerful.

The true nature and object of the meeting may be best gathered from what follows here:

When an hour or so had been occupied in receiving and considering the reports of the "Ministers," who were in reality delegates from the Governments of Peru, Chili, the Argentine, Brazil and Colombo, representing further all the minor South American States, Staunton, or "the President," as he was wont to be called, took up a folded newspaper which was lying before him, and after a few words in English with Kesteven, began in Spanish:

"Señores, I think I may take to myself the pleasure of saying that all the reports are as satisfactory to myself and my colleague as they are, I trust, to your Governments and yourselves. The good work, the work to which we have devoted ourselves, some of us at very considerable risk, is progressing excellently, and so well, indeed, that the day is not now far distant when the signal may be given for the Latin nations of the West to rise as one united world power and take, by force if necessary, their proper place among the nations of the earth."

A murmur of applause ran round the table, and dark, fierce eyes gleamed meaningly at each other and at the speaker. He smiled and went on:

"We have done much. We have united warring interests which for so long have retarded the development of the countries we love; we have made friends of those who, unhappily, once were enemies, and, perhaps best of all, we have, as I firmly believe, stamped out the bane of Revolution.

"By common consent now, the man who raises the standard of revolt in any South American State henceforth will be treated as a common enemy by all the other States and crushed. Our plans for internal development are practically complete, even to the provision for the construction of the Panama Canal by South American capital and under

NO DINNER IS COMPLETE

Relish for food and power to digest it are essential to sound health, for only by the digestion and assimilation of food, can the wear and tear of bodily tissue be replenished and life sustained. When digestion fails, as in dyspepsia or indigestion, both body and brain are starved and the patient becomes languid and weak, incapable of active, vigorous effort, or clear sustained thought.

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For INDIGESTION.

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the flag of the United States of South America. I need hardly remind any gentleman present that the absolute command of the waterway from the Atlantic to the Pacific will not be the least of the sources of our strength."

Here there was a louder murmur of approbation; in which Kesteven did not join. He looked down at the papers before him, and his lips moved slightly under his moustache.

"But, Señores," Staunton continued in a graver tone, "in spite of all this progress, all this triumph, I had almost said, it is my duty to tell you that there is still need, urgent need, for the greatest caution and discretion. Remember that the nearer we get to victory the more perilous our path becomes. In the issue of the *Times* which arrived from London this morning there is a leading article which demands our most careful, indeed, anxious consideration.

"I need hardly tell you of what importance this article is to us. Our good friend Señor Valdez will translate the whole of it for your use during the day; just now I will only ask you to listen to a few extracts which it may be necessary to discuss at once."

He took up the paper and began to read aloud in Spanish some passages marked in blue pencil.

"'There are two points of great significance which cannot fail to have struck the careful observer of South American affairs.

"'One, and that the most important, as well as the most mysterious, is the fact that all the South American Republics, even the most insignificant, have been arming both by land and sea to an extent totally disproportionate to their ordinary needs. The second is that, during that period, not only have inter-state jealousies and difficulties disappeared, but, more wonderful still, by some magic or other the demon of Revolution has apparently been laid.

"'It is practically impossible that these results can have been achieved without some powerful influence working from outside, nor is it credible that, in their present financial state, the Republics can have borne the vastly increased expenditure unaided. And yet there has been no attempt to raise new loans, nor, so far as we know, has there been any increase in taxation. On the contrary, if anything, the taxes are lower now than they were two years ago.

"'So far as we can discover, cash has been paid for everything in the way of armaments, and, if that is so, cash must have been pouring into the Republics from somewhere. The question is where?

"'Who is the magician who has worked these miracles?'

"That, Señores," continued Staunton, "will be enough, I think, for the present. In my opinion this article shows that although we are still unknown, and, therefore, unsuspected, our work is beginning to attract the suspicious attention of the world. That, perhaps, was only to be expected, and I think my agents have taken sufficient care that, for some time at least, there shall be no inconvenient diplomatic interference with our plans. At the same time I should like to have your opinions on the subject."

"Let us settle the matter by striking at once," cried a revolutionist from Colombo.

"It would, I think, be better to wait a little until our political affairs are fully settled. We must be certain of everybody before we declare ourselves," objected Isidore Pinheiro, a short, shaggy-browed, Portuguese Jew from Brazil. "We might spoil everything by haste."

The Argentine envoy agreed with him, and, as both Staunton and Kesteven, the latter for reasons which he would not have cared to explain to the meeting, were also in favour of continuing their present policy for the present, the more ardent spirits were obliged to yield on receiving a promise from the "Señor President" that operations should be hastened as much as safety permitted.

As Don Ramiero stood aside for his master to pass out, Kesteven said in a low tone to Staunton:

"Say, partner, ask the Señor to go out and look after our guests for a bit while they get their cocktails. I want a word with you."

"Well, what's the matter?" asked Staunton, not too good-humouredly, as the doors closed.

"I've been thinking," replied Kesteven slowly, "that it's about time I asked you to let me out of this business. The fact is I've had enough."

"I'm sorry to hear you say that. May I ask what you have to complain of?"

Staunton spoke coldly, and with a note of something like hostility in his tone, for, truth to tell, the partners in the greatest swindle that had ever been worked off on civilised society, had not been the best of friends since they had almost quarrelled over the disappearance of Wilfrid Ellerton.

"I'm complaining of nothing," replied Kesteven just as coldly. "I'm just going to ask you to remember that when we became partners again it was on the understanding that, when the business was fixed up, either could go out when he wanted to."

"From my point of view the work is anything but finished. On the contrary, it is only just beginning. You know Spanish enough to have understood all that was said just now."

"And just because I did understand it I'm going out," said Kesteven, looking him full in the eyes. "I've told you before that I don't take any stock of this political business, and I won't have any. I've helped you so far, as I said I would, but you're going too far for my taste. If you want reasons you can have them. In the first place, even you, strong man as you are, will no more get these greasers to hang together than you'd get a hundred assorted snakes to dwell together in unity. It isn't in their evil nature to do it."

"I think that is my business, and it is certainly my belief," retorted Staunton angrily, for this was a tender subject with him. "And your other reasons?"

"Are a bit stronger than that. In the first place I've got Cora to think about, and she's dead against the scheme.

"She knows that I've made a pretty respectable pile, and she has the natural inclinations of the properly-raised American girl towards coronets. There are two or three in England and over here that she may have for the taking, and coronets don't go with South American politics—not much. But what I go on most is this, my friend, and you may as well take a note of it. Suppose you do get this proposition of yours through, you can bet your life there's going to be a heap of trouble over it, and the other United States are going to take a hand in that. Well, I'm an American."

As Staunton was about to reply the telephone-bell rang. He took up the transmitter, hung it up again, and said:

"Lunch will be served in a few minutes. We shall have to postpone this discussion."

"There's no discussion on my part," replied the other shortly. "I'm done. Of course I shall keep faith as tight as if I was with you, but you must consider me out of the business. It's getting too sultry for my health."

"Then, of course, you'll draw the reduced dividend under the circumstances," asked Staunton, not very pleasantly.

"Not a cent, partner. You can have the lot. I'm getting tired of that, too, and my pile's quite big enough to make it bigger by what they humorously call legitimate means."

"Eh?" asked Staunton, a trifle anxiously, "you've not heard anything in the way of suspicions, have you, Kesteven?"

"Nothing definite, but I had advice from London this morning that this Mr. Dennison is one of the smartest men in the British Prosecutions Department, and also that Mr. Stanislaus Smith, who I needn't tell you is known to our detectives as about the smartest man in the International, has made another of his mysterious disappearances.

"We also know that they work together a lot, and maybe he isn't down here altogether for a holiday. Well, I guess we oughtn't to keep the Señors waiting too long."

Staunton's face wore a very troubled look as he passed out.

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

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A Life Sentence.

"Would you call stealing a kiss, larceny?" queried the inexperienced young man. "I suppose so," replied the married man, who was working from dawn to dusk to support his family. "What is the penalty?" "Why, I stole a kiss once, and was sentenced to hard labour for life."

Market Prices were Low.

Mrs. Joy: "If I do say it, my husband is worth millions of money to me." Mrs. Blunt: "How lucky of you to snap him up when he was going cheap!"

The Same Thing.

Ethel: "Did you hear of the engagement of Jack and Penelope?" Harold: "Dear me! Then Jack has finally succeeded?" Ethel: "No; succumbed."

Why She Enjoyed it.

Laura: "Alice Flitter is such a restful friend." Charles: "Restful? She talks all the time." "That's it; I never have to think about what to say when I'm with her."

She was an Unkind Miss.

Mr. Softly: "I feel—aw—vewy strongly tempted to blow out my bwains." Miss Cutting: "What a pity nature has put such a tragedy out of the bounds of possibility!"

Won her Consent.

"I am amazed, sir, that you should propose to my daughter. You have not known her a week." "True, madam, but I have known you for some time and everybody says your daughter takes after you."

Prepared for Emergencies.

He: "If you loved me, why did you at first refuse me?" She: "I wanted to see what you would do." He: "But I might have rushed off without waiting for an explanation." She: "I had the door locked."

It Did not Reassure Him.

Mr. Softleigh: "Tommy, do you really think your sister likes to see me better than she does Mr. Brown?" Tommy: "I'm sure of it, for evenings when he's in the parlour she turns the light down so low she can't see him at all."

Satisfactory Evidence.

Father: "Now, if you want a good husband, marry Mr. Goodheart. He really and truly loves you." Daughter: "Are you sure of that, father?" Father: "Yes, indeed. I've been borrowing money from him for six months, and still he keeps coming."

They Slated him Dreadfully.

"Why, Clara, dear, what has happened? It is not a month since your marriage, and I find you in tears already!" "Ah, Hilda, darling! George is standing as member for the county, you know, and I've only just learnt from the opposition papers what a really dreadful man I have married!"

She Wanted Them Squeaky.

Blanche: "I want a pair of slippers for father—number tens, please, and—squeaky." Genial Shoemaker: "Squeaky, miss? I'm afraid we haven't any of that kind." Blanche: "I am so sorry. Couldn't you make him a squeaky pair? There is a certain young gentleman who visits me frequently, and it would be very convenient for him to know just when pa is coming downstairs."

That Silenced Him.

He: "Yes, I only need to talk with a lady fifteen minutes and I know just what she thinks of me." She: "But you must find it very unpleasant."

She Made a Bad Bargain then.

The Husband (during the quarrel): "You're always making bargains. Was there ever a time when you didn't?" The Wife: "Yes, sir; on my wedding-day."

The Reason.

He (mournfully): "I would I were a cloud." She: "What on earth for?" He: "Because they say that 'every cloud has a silver lining,' but my pockets are quite empty."

So What was the Good?

Mother: "I'm surprised at you! Couldn't you tell he was going to kiss you?" Daughter: "Yes, ma, but there was no one for me to tell, except him, and he knew it already."

Artful, Very.

"You want a keepsake that will always remind you of me?" she said. "I do, darling," he said tenderly. "What's the matter with myself?" she whispered. There will be a wedding shortly.

Better than He Expected.

Beryl: "Yes, when Jack married her he thought she was an angel, but it wasn't long before he found out his mistake." Sibyl: "Disappointed?" Beryl: "I should say not. He found she was a good cook."

The Worm Turned.

"John," she said, "there's nothing I enjoy more than reading the last words of great men. I wonder what your last words will be?" "Maria," he replied, "the last word is something I never expect to have." However, he got it that time.

They Wouldn't be Ladylike.

Young Mr. Spoonamore (who has just been accepted): "But what will your father say, darling? You know he doesn't like me any too well." The Young Woman: "Well, you can't expect me to use the exact language in which papa will express himself when he hears of it."

He was Not at all Poetic.

"Do you often wonder, George," she said softly, as they stood at the gate, "at the infinite number of stars, where that vast, silent, eternal procession is going, and whence it came?" "Ye-es," replied George, rather hesitatingly; "but don't you find that to look at the sky for any length of time makes the back of your neck ache?"

No Excuse for That.

She: "Have you been to see the menagerie yet?" He: "No; I intended going last evening, but was stopped by one of the animals." She: "How was that? Did one of the lions break loose?" He: "Oh, no; nothing so exciting. I was prevented from going by the reindeer. Er—you see, it was a wet night."

What He Intended.

"Young man," said a stern parent, "do you intend to stay here all night holding my daughter's hand and looking into her eyes like a sick calf?" "No, sir." "What do you intend to do, then?" "Well, I thought that when you did us the kindness to retire I would put my arm round her waist, and if she did not object too forcibly I might risk a kiss."

Affinity.

"Yes," sighed the fair young thing. "I admit that I like you—but it does not seem to me that we were ever meant for each other. We have not a single taste in common." Mournfully the young man studied the floor for some moments. At last he looked up with the dawn of hope in his eyes. "But, yes," he whispered. "Are you not very fond of onions?" Blushingly she nodded a confession. "So am I!" he cried rapturously.

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Early Morning Catarrh

In an editorial on Catarrh in the last number of the *Review of Nose and Throat Diseases*, there is mentioned the tendency of catarrhal diseases to become especially troublesome in the morning. The explanation of this is to be found in the fact that during the night when the body is recumbent, the catarrhal accumulations pass backward from the nasal cavities into the throat. In the morning, on waking, these accumulations cause hacking, coughing, or scraping to free the throat from the phlegm. Nearly all those who suffer from nasal complaints have this symptom, and in some cases it becomes so prominent as to be called "Early morning catarrh." This number of the *Review* also contains a "Supplement" giving the details of a large number of cases of catarrh cured by a new method, which has been successful where operative procedures and cauterisations have failed. There is, likewise, a Report Form, by means of which patients suffering with deafness, or ear, nose, or throat ailments can obtain free advice by post. Those who are interested can secure a copy of the *Review* (with supplement and report form), free by post by addressing the Editor, Drouet Institute, 10 Marble Arch, London, W. The Editor advises patients, however, when possible, to visit the Drouet Institute for a personal consultation with the medical staff. Consulting hours are—in the morning, 10 to 12, and in the afternoon, 2 to 4, week days only. A fee of five shillings is charged for personal consultations.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

The Weary One.

"W. E. R." is afraid his sweetheart of three years' standing has grown tired of him. She does not seem as pleased to see him as she used, nor does she take as much interest in his doings. Besides, her letters have grown cold and uninteresting. What should he do?"

* * * * *

If you feel there has been a falling off in her affection for you, you should candidly ask her if she still wishes to keep to your engagement. Possibly she has really grown tired of you. You seem to describe the usual symptoms of weariness. Offer to release her, if she wishes, and make that the test of her feelings towards you.

Are Handsome Men Humbugs?

"QUEENIE" is receiving attentions from a very handsome young man, who is greatly admired by other girls, and does not seem to mind the admiration. What "QUEENIE" wants to know is, "are men of that kind usually sincere, and should she allow matters to go any further?"

* * * * *

I don't see why a handsome man should be any less sincere than anybody else. The fact that, with so many would-be admirers, he has selected yourself, seems to show that his sincerity is unusually genuine. As to the attentions of other girls, that is his misfortune, poor fellow. Make every allowance for it. That he "does not seem to mind it," may be just his good nature, and does not mean insincerity.

London for Honeymooners.

"I AM a country girl, and shall be married to a neighbouring farmer next month," writes "MAGGIE." "We very much want to spend our honeymoon in London. Do you think this advisable at this time of year?"

* * * * *

I think London a very nice place for a young married couple at any time of year, provided they do not foolishly overdo their programme of amusements. Do not wear yourself out by too much sight-seeing or theatre-going. A young married couple of my acquaintance spent a week in London lately, for their honeymoon, and found that they enjoyed themselves as much by riding on 'buses, and walking about the quaint old streets, looking at shops and dropping into funny little restaurants and tea-shops, as they would have done had they visited all the show places. I dare say you would find it the same. As to expense, if your means allow, there are plenty of quiet hotels in the Strand district, where you would be comfortable at very moderate cost, and would save the railway fares and fatigue of a stay in the suburbs.

Breaking it to the Other Girl.

"H. J." is engaged. He has announced the affair privately to one or two friends. There is another, however, who should know of it—a girl to whom he has been recently paying attentions—and "H. J." is perplexed to know how to acquaint her with the fact that all must now cease between them. He did not really love this girl, but found her society very agreeable, and corresponded with her. He thinks, however, that she is fond of him, and would be hurt at the news of his engagement.

* * * * *

"H. J." will gain nothing by deceptive methods. Evidently he has not behaved very openly with the girl in question, or he would have given her clearly to understand that his feelings for her were merely those of friendship. I advise him to write to her and tell her the whole truth. Her disappointment may be great, but she would be very hurt indeed if she thought he was ashamed to tell her the truth.

Trouble Over a Trousseau.

"I HAVE a very economical parent," writes "MILLIE." "He disbelieves in wedding expenses, and has even refused to pay for my trousseau. I am to be married next Spring, but my father gets angry every time I mention the subject, and meanwhile I am in a horrid position about the whole matter."

* * * * *

Probably your father wants educating, so don't get impatient. Wait until after Christmas, before you press him on the matter. I take it you have no mother, but surely you have an aunt, or a cousin, or a married sister, who would not mind taking your case in hand. If your father actually refuses, after this pressure, to grant you the necessary allowance, then tell your lover the plain, straightforward truth, and if he is really fond of you, he will not be particular about the trousseau. After all, there is a good deal of sham about the preparations many people make for weddings. A marriage without a trousseau would be a bit of a novelty, and no doubt later on in life, you and your husband will have a good laugh over the silly affair.

The Suicidal Sweetheart.

THE young man who makes love to "ETHEL" is very morbid and depressing. She likes him fairly well, but doubts if she really loves him. He, however, professes passionate attachment for her. When she talks of other people, or on general subjects, he persists in telling her he does not believe in her love. He also is always threatening to make away with himself. What is the best thing for "ETHEL" to do?

* * * * *

If you do not love him, "ETHEL," do not deceive him about it, no matter how much you fear hurting his feelings. The morbid young man, who always threatens to make away with himself on small pretexts, is probably not serious. A good many people talk like that, but very rarely carry out their threats. I knew a young man who was notorious for this kind of thing. He had paid attentions to some dozens of girls in his time, and with every one of them he had talked in this gloomy fashion. He is still living, and is, I believe, treating yet another sweetheart to the same dismal programme. Very little is gained by encouraging such men. Straightforward talk is the best tonic.

Cynthia

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ON BEING SHY.

Jerome says, "A shy man's lot is not a happy one. The men dislike him, the women despise him, and he dislikes and despises himself." So "being shy" must be a sore evil under the sun. To be rich, or great, or good, or ambitious, on healthy lines is commendable, but to be shy seems to bring down on yourself universal contempt and pity, and the worst of it is you feel you don't deserve it. Of course Jerome refers to *men*, for you seldom meet a shy girl. Girls are merrie, and coy, and blushing, and nice (some of them exceptionally nice), but shy girls are as scarce as bank notes. One writer advertises a cure for shyness in men. He says, "Adopt an easy and pleasing manner, especially towards ladies." Easier said than done. Very seldom *married* men are shy. It would do some of them a lot of good if they were. But can you imagine a man or a woman either being too shy to go and purchase a box of Page Woodcock's Wind Pills, the finest remedy for the cure of Indigestion, Wind on the Stomach, Liver Complaints, Sick Headache, Costiveness, Nervous Debility, Palpitation of the Heart, Biliousness? No, I really can't.

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MOTHER, SON AND DAUGHTER

CURED OF INDIGESTION, DEBILITY, AND DIZZINESS.

"FOR a long time I suffered so from Indigestion, Weakness, and Debility that it was with difficulty I moved about," said Mrs. Turner, of Moorgate, Retford, in the course of an interview with a *Retford and Gainsboro' Times'* reporter. "I had a constant feeling of heaviness at the stomach, and, do what I would, I could not get rid of it. My breathing was laboured and caused great pain. Many a time, when outside, I had actually to stand still in order to get my breath, so bad had I become. One day a neighbour gave me a few Bile Beans to see if they would do me any good. I thought they did. I purchased some and from the time I began to take them I have gradually improved, until now I am quite well again." Mrs. Turner's daughter who had also suffered from nervous debility said:

"My strength left me, I became depressed, and lost all interest in everything. So dreadfully low did I get that I could hardly move about, and I felt as if I should like to go to bed and not get up again. My mother said it was dreadful to see me so ill, and gave me some of the Bile Beans, so I determined to give them a fair trial. Although only a short time has elapsed since I began to take them, my weakness and depression are gone, and my strength has returned. Bile Beans are certainly a wonderful medicine."

"A neighbour gave me a few Bile Beans."

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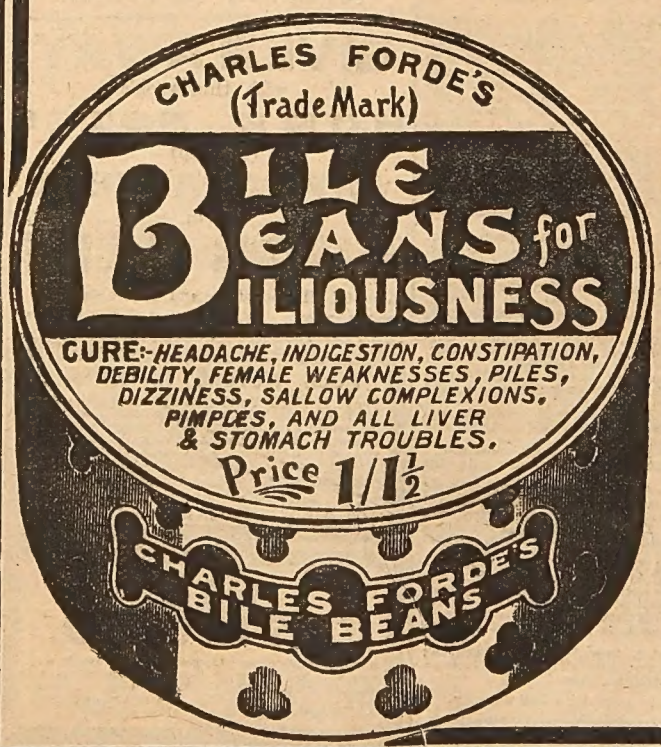
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